

Dragoon

Arc 7

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Chapter 125: The Port Town and the Empire

In the port town of Beretta, Eunius and Aleist were undertaking Keith's tutelage alongside Rudel.

The expedition had displayed quite some interest in a lesson from a dragoon like Keith.

Inspectors Izumi and Millia also sat, under the blue sky, receiving the salty sea breeze as they watched Keith drag a blackboard over. Bennet sat next to Rudel with the intent to learn what she could.

While Izumi didn't mind it, Millia was taking some fleeting glances. From Izumi's point of view, she wanted her to be more wary of Keith, but she was troubled over how she couldn't bring herself to say it. For the innocent Millia and Bennet who didn't possess the knowledge, Izumi had some resistance to explaining everything from scratch.

Aleist's subordinates were listening in from behind Izumi. While they looked to be a graceful gathering at a glance, the lecturer Keith seemed quite displeased.

"Why are there so many women? You're in the way."

"Lieutenant, please tell us what today's lecture's about!"

"Good question, Rudel. Today I'll have you do some classroom learning on the relation between dragoon and dragon. I could teach you through practicals, but it would be better if you started those out with the knowledge, after all."

When Rudel raised his hand to ask a question, Keith instantly made a smile. He was as unfazed as ever. Gripping her beloved katana's sheath in her left hand so she could draw it at any moment, Izumi didn't let her guard down for an instant.

"First off, we're going with current and past relations. In the past, dragoons largely focused on fighting to protect a dragon's back. That really hasn't changed, but fundamentally speaking, against a monster capable of piercing a dragon's scales, a human is powerless!"

As Keith suddenly rejected a dragoon's reason to be, Rudel directed some serious eyes. His face flushing, Keith continued on his explanation.

"Then if all you have to do is find yourself some means of mid and long-range attack, you just have to draw out the dragon's own power. That's how I see it."

On the blackboard, Keith drew an x over the picture of a knight firing magic from a dragon's back. While Keith was definitely weak, he had still cleared the basic physical criteria to be a knight.

"Protecting a dragon's back is something of the past. In the current era, they're shifting towards controlling their dragons, but... that really is meaningless, you know. I mean all they're doing is removing the 'protect the back' part of their duty, those slackers."

"But mid-range attacks are..."

"I'm telling you it's meaningless, shrimp."

Bennet's objection was cut down by Keith. There, Rudel to her side tried comforting her.

"It's alright, Major! I also think mid-range attacks are important."

"A-aye."

Millia and Keith watched over that exchange with irritation. Izumi thought the way Bennet happily wagged her tail was cute. After clearing his throat, Keith went into an explanation as to why it was unnecessary. It was surely because of the emphasis Rudel placed on mid-range attack methods. If it was Bennet's opinion, he had already discarded it.

"If all your own attacks can do is serve as a diversion, then you're better off concentrating on giving orders to your dragon. That's the honest-to-goodness truth. But I thought I'd take that one step further. You better put the words, 'draw out a dragon's power,' into your head."

"Draw out its power?"

When Izumi let out her voice, that's right, Keith muttered with a click of his tongue. Rudel and Bennet sunk into thought.

"What do you mean by draw out its power?"

Bennet asked. If her orders took precedence, the dragon would move, it had always been like that and she didn't understand the meaning of the words themselves. It was a question quite fit for Bennet, who had gained a means of mid-range attack to protect her dragon's back.

"All you've ever done is order it around. What I'm trying to say is pulling out its abilities. Let's see... I don't mean to tack on a little extra strength. What's important is control. You have to operate a dragon's power. I have this one technique called Rainbow Mirage, and that's a prime example of this theory in motion!"

While he proudly unveiled the name of his technique, no one around seemed to understand what it was. As Rudel looked around troubled, Izumi extended a helping hand.

"Rudel, um... he's talking about that body double technique. Probably."

"You mean those body doubles, Lieutenant!?"

Against Rudel's sparkling eyes, Keith faltered. As Izumi smiled at her small revenge for all his usual conduct, with a mortified face, Keith changed his technique name from Rainbow Mirage to body double.

Those clones of water he produced, Rudel had seen them as well. He just didn't know the attack name, and Izumi had somehow noticed and connected the dots. Being understood, put him in quite an unpleasant mood.

"A dragon's latent abilities are high. In order for us dragoons to control them, more than the telepathic bond we share, we need to understand one another. But... in your case, your dragon's a subspecies, so it'll be difficult."

"It's difficult?"

On Bennet's question, Keith informed her there were absolutely no documents available. You can't draw out what isn't there. It all starts from looking into past records to see what sort of thing their dragons have done, and what they're capable of. That was Keith's way of going about it.

But Rudel's dragon Sakuya was a gaia subspecies. What's more, even if its appearance had some common points, it was easier to say it was a separate species entirely.

“In this case, the problem is that the dragon itself hasn’t noticed its own attributes. She’s still young. No, she’s way too young.”

Seeing Keith seriously mull, Eunius was surprised. He whispered over to Aleist who was sitting beside him.

“He’s surprisingly decent. I thought he’d be a bit more of a lost cause.”

“Hah? Of course Keith-san is decent.”

“... Just where does that trust of yours come from. You’ve got to tell me sometime.”

Izumi endorsed Eunius’ opinion as she worried for Aleist’s chastity. But to Izumi, Rudel was higher on her order of precedence. Meaning even if Aleist was assaulted in some way by Keith, she was going to let it be.

She wasn’t abandoning him. If Izumi raised a hand, she understood the situation would clearly take a turn for the worse. While Aleist’s chastity was important, by protecting him, there was no guarantee his harem members wouldn’t misunderstand something.

As things stood, Millia had yet to become wary of Keith. From Izumi’s point of view, she was wary of the harmless Bennet, and what a wasted effort that was.

“If you give the average dragoon a value of one, while dragons all have individual difference, the power difference puts them well over a hundred. It’s generally impossible for a human to win out over a dragon, after all.”

After writing that humans can’t beat dragons on the board, he sent a glance around as if to ask, ‘then what are they supposed to do?’

“Adding your own power onto theirs is slight and insignificant. If all you’re doing is protecting its back, then you should strengthen the dragon. That’s why I decided to draw out my dragon’s strength. The body doubles is a part of that. You make the shape of a dragon with water, and imitate the surface.”

“Is that really possible? Mana-capacity-wise, you wouldn’t be able to use that much magic too many times.”

Rudel tilted his head. There, Keith spoke with a smile.

“Hahaha, I can’t create those doubles on my own. Who do you think I am? I

don't have that sort of mana, and I don't have the control. That's why I put my own dragon to it. I understand his exact characteristics, transmit a clear image, and support him in the finer points. With that alone, a dragon's strength rapidly increases. You don't need some mid or long-range magic. More so, as long as you can do something like this, you're doing good as a dragoon."

While the eyes watching Keith grew surprisingly favorable, Bennet put a damper on his parade.

"Hey... doesn't that mean you're casting off everything apart from aerial combat?"

"And what of it? Something so savage as fighting on the dirt isn't suited to me. Just have that gorilla Cattleya do it or something."

Did something happen with Cattleya? Izumi thought, as Keith's lesson came to an end. As Aleist headed off to help him clean up, Eunius approached Rudel.

"Oy, Rudel."

"What is it? I was planning on helping the Lieutenant."

"It's been a while, let's have a match. You've been going all over the place, and it's boring me to death. Aren't you curious to see how strong you've become?"

"... Eunius."

While Rudel made a bit of a fed-up face, Izumi understood. That wasn't him fed up over Eunius challenging him to a match.

"You better not regret it."

"Good grief. You guys are always the same."

A ghastliness befell upon Rudel's smile that could be called battle mania. Seeing that expression, Eunius also changed to a ferocious grin.

Bennet looked over the two with tired eyes, but she looked just a little happy.

However...

"I can't stand it anymore!"

Looking at Rudel and Bennet, Millia finally exploded.



“I’m telling you, the major is definitely dangerous!”

“C-calm down. The major isn’t dangerous at all. More so, that idiot over there is—”

“They’re both guys, right? What are you talking about, Izumi!”

“... Hey?”

“What?”

It did seem Millia was mindful of the female knight of the wolf tribe close to Rudel. While they did get along, Eunius saw it as the relationship between superior and subordinate. He knew his close friend Rudel, and Bennet’s actions didn’t have anything to do with man or woman.

And yet, Millia was wary of Bennet. Still such accusations, Bennet still stood with resolution, but her tail and dog ears were in a terrible station.

“Why is that woman so angry?”

“Are you talking about Millia? She hasn’t seen eye to eye with Izumi lately. It’s been like that ever since we came here... Izumi’s been aggressive towards Lieutenant Keith, and Millia’s been wary of Major Bennet. I don’t know the reason either.”

“Ah, I see. Right, right. That’s the sort of guy you are.”

Recalling how Rudel wasn’t wary of Keith, Eunius was convinced his friend’s chastity had been protected by Izumi. He suddenly wondered whether Aleist would be alright, but he had a number of key harem member with him, so he’d probably be fine, or so Eunius changed his train of thought.

As Rudel didn’t understand, he mulled over whether to inform Rudel that Keith was dangerous precisely because they were members of the same sex. In truth, even if the two of them had their innocence stolen, he thought it might become a funny story.

While he was worried, it was interesting no matter which way the ball rolled. Keith was so entranced with Aleist and Rudel that he calculated there was no danger of himself becoming a casualty.

More importantly...

(This isn't the atmosphere to have a duel.)

The fact he wasn't able to fight Rudel displeased Eunius. It did seem Millia and Izumi had stolen the flow away.

The arguments of women would gradually intensify. At first, they would argue over whether Keith or Bennet was more dangerous, gradually shifting to things of the past. Eunius thought women who never forgot their grudges were scary.

"You called me a bug back at the academy, didn't you!"

"T-that just came to my mind during the match and... t-that has nothing to do with what's happening right now!"

Two of Aleist's harem stepped in to soothe them, but the problem was they didn't have the slightest effect. Within that never-ending argument, Bennet pulled at Rudel's sleeve.

"D-did I do something problematic?"

While she acted out a firm bearing, her voice was shaking. Her eyes were swimming around. To such a commanding officer, Rudel spoke gently.

"That's not true at all! You're the ideal superior, Major! I can say with pride that I'm glad to have become your subordinate."

"I-I see."

As she averted her face, Bennet's tail swung happily from left to right. Her form brought to mind the image of a dog rejoicing after receiving praise from its master.

But thinking it was strange the voices had died down, Eunius looked at Millia and Izumi only to feel intense regret.

"Just look at that! Just look at how much that woman's tail is wagging! She's definitely gunning for Rudel!"

"I'm telling you, that's not the sort of thing we're dealing with! Can't you get a grip already?"

Seeing the exchange between Rudel and Bennet, the two heated up even further. The members of Aleist's harem around had already given up on

persuading them.

(These guys are useless!)

I won't be able to fight Rudel today, Eunis instinct promptly informed him.



"... They're more vindictive than I thought."

"That does seem to be the case."

Fina's room at the academy was already in a state more like an office equipped with a bed. Having entered her final year, Fina only had a few months left until graduation.

While Sophina thought a school life that ended with fluffing and work was mistaken, she didn't say it aloud. If she didn't have the needlessly competent Fina, she never would have made it this far to begin with.

On top of the nobles and authorities connected to Aileen, the augmented war potential of the royal guard...

Everything had come together.

"When we have to prepare on two fronts, the border and the palace, they only have to pay mind to the palace, so they sure have it easy."

"Worse comes to worst, can't we keep it to the palace? In that scenario, we can concentrate our own forces."

"... That's no good."

While Fina didn't know how both sides were connected, she did suspect how each side reacted and moved in accordance.

While they would likely move the moment her side showed an opening, the enemy country was showing movements as if they knew precisely when that time would come. It was a dangerous situation, Sophina thought over the worst possible scenario and wanted to concentrate their forces at the palace.

Rather than trying to win both fronts, she wanted to stop Aileen's reckless that was definitely going to break out.

But Fina's opinion differed.

“In the case that the empire has gained the means to stand against the kingdom, there is no meaning if we suppress the palace alone. If they manage to snatch up a large amount of land, then they will gain just as much power on the rematch. The top brass of the kingdom will need some time to recover from its chaos, and in that time, the empire should be able to get its war potential together. If we don’t suppress both fronts, we won’t survive.”

The empire’s hatred of the kingdom, from the people of the kingdom’s point of view, it was nothing but false charges. You live on abundant soil, so fork it over, is what they were saying. That was the country’s recognition of the empire.

Sophina knew the lands of the empire were impoverished. What’s more, she knew just how important it was to them to invade Courtois and steal its soil.

“When territories are stolen, there will be some nobles who turn coat. And if I let my sister get away, there will definitely be nobles to raise a rebellion. We have to win both sides no matter what.”

As she accepted a few documents from Fina, Sophina made a grim face. The nobles they recognized to be allied with Aileen. In a situation where they couldn’t lose to the Gaia Empire or Aileen, the country of Courtois... Fina’s powers were being cornered.

No, it wasn’t a corner they were being driven into. Fina had started this match well-aware of her disadvantage.

Within a present state that only grew harsher the more time transpired. Fina was trying to create a build up a stage she could overcome. Sophina was also moving and lending her power for that sake.

“... If nothing else, it’s our fortune a princess was allowed into the academy. Before the enemy moves, we’ve been able to build our own personal forces like this. If we were in the palace, we’d never be able to move to this extent.”

Sophina’s opinion wasn’t mistaken. In the palace, they would never have been able to establish so many connections. At the same time, they were able to move away from Aileen’s eyes. It could truly be called fortune.

“I know, right!? It’s because I’m loved! I’m a maiden loved by the fluffadise

above! You can call me the fluffmaiden if you wish... no, that doesn't sound right. I get the feeling maiden's veering in the wrong direction. This body of mine ain't gonna stay pure for long."

Seeing Fina's tension suddenly rise, Sophina noticed it was about time for her concentration to run out. As she had Mii prepare tea, Fina leapt out of her seat and headed off towards the white cat tribe lass.

"If only she didn't have this side, she'd be perfect..."

Sophina breathed out a sigh as she gazed over Fina expressionlessly fluffing up Mii.



"The results of the experimental subject?"

Mies Licorise wore a lab coat.

In the laboratory, her subordinates were busily making records of the cages containing the black monsters. The final adjustments on the strengthened monsters were being in that lab of the Gaia empire.

Ogres and orcs, wyverns and a wide array of different monsters, you could say their control experiments were proceeding smoothly.

"No problems to report. It has already received a high evaluation taking on monsters within imperial territory."

Taking the documents from her subordinate, Mies read the report of the newly formed unit. When operating monsters, if taking command was possible, they needed an exclusive unit to do so. For that sake, they were conducted experiment after experiment, combatting monsters on imperial soil.

Seeing the papers that reported absolutely no problem, her subordinate seemed self-confident. But Mies was beginning to fear it a bit.

"If we keep on succeeding like this, it does feel somewhat eerie. More importantly, it seems some of the monsters they took on fled in the direction of Courtois, but how is that handling?"

"Nothing to worry about. It's a common occurrence. Some common monsters were just driven out of the mountains."

As her subordinate showed no particular concern, Mies warned him not to let his guard down. To her, this research held a vital meaning.

“We’ve been pushing ourselves too hard this past year. The higher-ups told us not to make too big of a ruckus before the invasion, so be careful henceforth.”

“Y-yes.”

As her subordinate man left the area, Mies headed for the space in front of the largest cage. Their prototype of a large monster called a gora sat quietly, still with its ferocious expression on its face. On top of the fangs that stuck out of its mouth, when it became an enhanced variant, its skin and fur dyed a shade of black, making for a truly ominous sight.

For some reason, a white tattoo spread across its body, and large bat like wings spread out from its back. The gora’s eyes narrowed as it looked at Mies, it almost seemed to be laughing.

“... You monster.”

A cold sweat running along her back, Mies left with due haste.

Chapter 126: The Hippogryph and the Knight of Shadows

Noon had already passed by the time the notice reached the port town of Beretta.

To the three dragoons on duty, a report came in that some towns and villages near the border were under attack. The ones who delivered the messages was a knight mainly tasked as a messenger.

Those knights who rode hippogryphs, crosses between horses and gryphons, were a shadow unit largely specialized in working with information. Unlike the dragoons, who could only take action as a public affair, they would accomplish their missions without standing out.

The hippogryph took the form of a horse, entering the port town with an innocent face. But those knights who tamed beasts even rarer than dragons were those who served directly under the royal line. It was unnatural to find one in a place like this.

“You’re telling us to sortie?”

Wearing a hood, the knight’s face couldn’t be made out. While the inside of the hood was definitely dark, they seemed to be wearing some sort of mask.

After bringing their feet to Bennet in civilian clothing, they gathered the relevant personnel and undid their disguises in the meeting room.

Eunius and Aleist, who had been forcefully dragged along the way, showed different reactions as they stood before a knight of a famous brigade, in a sense.

While Eunius was full of interest towards that nameless brigade he was seeing for the first time, Aleist firmly tilted his head. Even when it came to hippogryphs, it seems he didn’t even know of their very existence in this world.

While gryphons were impossible to tame by human hands, if one were to sire a child with a mare, a hippogryph was the result. That being the case, gryphons would more often than not make meals of horses, and hippogryphs themselves

were infertile. For that sake, their conception itself was rare.

“Yes. We do not have the ability to hold them in place. Speaking to their scale, the option of diverting them away from the towns and villages will prove difficult.”

Before the masked knight who replied to Bennet with a muffled voice, Keith was silent. While Keith was usually the sort to start a ruckus, when it came to work, his expression changed.

“The scale is far too grand. What happened?”

“We cannot offer you the specifics... but, it’s certain they’re flowing in from the empire’s side. To add to that, it is doubtful that a second wave will come.”

“Counting the small fries, it’s a scale surpassing a thousand.”

“I observed them from afar, and they seem to be searching for food. It’s a considerably dangerous situation.”

Bennet put together a plan from the information coming in. But there, Aleist stepped into the ranks. From what he had heard, it was certain this knight sat and watched while the monsters attacked a village.

“You don’t mean you overlooked them!”

As he drew close to a robed knight, Eunius grasped his shoulders. When Aleist turned, Eunius shook his head to the side.

“That’s just the sort of unit this one belongs to. While they may be knights, they’re the sort of folks who conceal their numbers and history to work for the crown. That they even came to notify us is a miracle.”

Eunius turned his gaze to the robed knight. The knight who couldn’t be made out as man or woman showed not the slightest quiver. As Aleist looked down, Bennet came to the conclusion they were in a situation where no ordinary means of communication was viable.

“Keith, take the lead and take down the monsters around the settlement under attack. Upon my arrival, I’ll enter ground combat. After that.—”

“I-I’ll go too!”

“Oy!”

When Bennet put out orders, Aleist let out his will to tag along. Eunius thought it was a discourtesy to involve one's self in the dealings of another brigade and tried to stop him. But Bennet gave consent.

(This might be just right.)

"Rudel, this time, you'll be riding my Heleene. If those two over there wish to ride, they can come along as well."

As Bennet gave the word, Keith made a stern expression. He surely wanted to criticize her for taking any unrelated people to the site, however, Bennet informed him before he could open his mouth.

"At the battle site, procedure has you come under my command. What's more, the tagalongs have simply increased from two to four."

Keith scratched his head, and while he didn't fully accept it, if it was an order... or so he silently rushed out of the room. Just as he left the meeting room, his dragon started its descent outside the building, having been put on standby in the air.

Thinking he would be a reliable subordinate, this time, she turned her whole body towards her direct subordinate Rudel.

"Rudel, you will not be taking Sakuya on this mission."

"Major, Sakuya can do it. If it's just monsters, then—"

"It seems you are misunderstanding something. Let me spell it out clearly. What is demanded of us is the perfect execution of a mission. She did her best? That effort isn't even worthy of evaluation. I have determined it is impossible for your dragon to execute the mission. That is why you're not bringing her."

On the verge of opening his mouth, Rudel looked down mortified as he put nothing more than his acceptance to mouth. While Bennet wanted to try cheering up her subordinate, they didn't have the time. Thinking there would be some time to talk en route, she rushed into her preparations.

"We're heading out at once. Prepare what you can, if you're not at the plaza, you'll be left behind."

After calling over to Aleist and Eunius, Bennet rushed out of the meeting

room herself. For her equipment, she just had to fasten her bag to her dragon.

She could settle Rudel's worries in the sky. That's all she had to think, and yet she ended up mulling over something unnecessary.

(Sakuya-chan's going to be depressed.)



Following on from Keith's lead, the party headed off for a counteroffensive, but from her dragon's back, Bennet issued the orders for the site.

"Protection of the civilians?"

In regards to Izumi's question, Bennet spoke.

"That's right. Rudel and I will sweep up the monsters that infiltrated. The rest of you will be guarding the civilians who've evacuated. Generally speaking, you'd be in the way otherwise."

Hearing he would be in the way, Aleist started to his feet, but Eunius stopped him. The very fact that the usual Eunius would probably rise at those words as well only made Aleist more surprised.

"We're capable of fighting too."

"She knows that. She took us along because we can fight. But this is Rudel's job. We shouldn't get in the way."

Being talked to in a manner as if to soothe a child irritated him, but Aleist had no words to return. He understood. He never thought he'd be able to establish coordination with the others in this battle, but he did have the will to help.

Both side of the coin mingled within him, leaving him at a loss for words.

"Aleist, leave it to me and the Major."

When Rudel said it, Aleist could only nod.

(Goddammit. Aren't I supposed to strong? Wasn't I supposed to have become strong?)

He was irritated at his own uselessness. If he was the protagonist of the story, then no matter the time, he should be able to make the impossible possible. So he thought, but the real him was different.

Cleaning day in and day out, he was an existence distant from anything that could be called the lead role. Even so, some day... he had held onto the belief, but he knew reality was never so sweet.

Raising his face, he looked at the town raising black smoke. If they carried out their lives, surely smoke would rise, but it was a dark smoke that failed to give off the slightest sense of liveliness. On that scene where he thought he might hear human screams at any moment, Aleist swallowed his breath.

(I'm scared.)

He wasn't afraid of battle. He was afraid of his own powerlessness. Atop the dragon's back, Aleist strengthened his resolve. Just as he was about to tell himself he wasn't the same useless child he once was, Bennet...

"We're landing in the town plaza, but we don't have the time for a descent. I'll put her on an inverted flight, so just jump down."

"Yes! ... wait, what?"

From the large bag fastened to the dragon's back, Bennet produced a metal boomerang that spanned her whole height.

What's more, it wasn't just one or two. She had stuffed what could be called several dozens of boomerangs into her bag.

"Major, should I hold that for you?"

Rudel called out in worry, but Bennet wagged her tail as she denied it.

"You fool! What good will it do in your hands? Keep a good eye on the way I fight. If Keith is doing well at the vanguard, then right around now..."

In the air above the town they approached, a water dragon was firing a stream of attacks towards the ground. Attacking the area around the ground, it eliminated the monsters flying through the sky. But as a dragon's attacks would raze the town, its assault was limited to the town's airspace and exterior.

Seeing the skillful manipulation of the dragon, everyone held the impression it would be impossible for Sakuya. More than that, she might even erase the town alongside the monsters.

"... Looks like he's doing just fine. Heleene, meet up with Spinnith and strike

down the monsters around.”

As Bennet called out to her own dragon, the dragon gave a single roar in the air. It was as if it was responding to say it understood. If anyone apart from a dragoon saw the scene, it would look like a one-sided conversation with a dragon.

“Then we’re off.”

“Ah, wai... gyaaaah!!”

Taking a sudden nose-dive, Heleene turned and flew in a position with her stomach face up. From what had once been a stable flight, her motions changed to a trajectory that brought a roller coaster to mind. Aleist was never too good with roller coasters.

“Aleist, you’ll bite your tongue.”

“My thoughts exactly.”

While Rudel worried for Aleist, Eunius was making a fed-up face. With this being their first real battle, neither Izumi nor Millia found the leisure to pay mind to Aleist’s tensions. Meanwhile, Rudel was calling out to those two.

Aleist regretted it just a bit that he had missed the perfect opportunity.

“And here we go.”

Watching Bennet’s back, Aleist was surprised. Grasping a bundle of those large boomerangs, she went straight into throwing them. The number thrown in that instant was six. From there, they flew, spinning with good momentum to find a target in the monsters on the ground.

Each time they stuck into the earth, they would sew monsters onto it. Once she had finished throwing eighteen, Bennet cried out.

“Now, jump off!”

Seeing everyone jump off, Aleist jumped down just a little late. His timing slightly off, he was the only one who fell into the fountain in the center of the plaza. After his body struck the fountain water that rose to about knee-level, he sunk from the weight of his equipment.

“What are you doing, Aleist!? You’re alright, right? Right!?”

“I-I’m fine...”

Crawling out of the water, Aleist sent Millia a smile. But Millia immediately commenced a survey of the area.

While Millia had called out to him, Aleist was the sort who was happy even if it was a yell. Looking around, they could see Bennet and Rudel commence their action.

“I saw them evacuating to the south in droves. You lot, head straight south!”

With those words, the two started running west and soon went out of sight.

“Bennet-san has good eyes.”

Holding such an out-of-place impression, Aleist hardened his resolve as he and the other three ran off to save the townsfolk.



While they each possessed different means of high-speed movement, looking at the result, it seemed as if Rudel was just barely managing to follow.

It was a small town, where three story buildings were rare, and the highest they would go. The two of them were clearing up monsters in the area where the residential buildings were closely packed together. But in the space where Rudel defeated a single monster, Bennet was defeating them one after the next.

Defeating a monster on the move, she would instantly search out her next target.

(She really is fast.)

When it came to instantaneous acceleration, Rudel wasn’t losing. More than that, when it came to speed, Rudel surely had the upper hand.

Bennet tossed two knives at the two goblins who tried to flee into an alleyway. With their vitals accurately captured, the two died instantly.

Bennet and Rudel leapt freely across the spaces between buildings, but their movements were different. Rudel couldn’t help but decelerate right before an attack.

There, they heard a scream.

When he slowed down to check, he found a single orc about to lower an adze of stone and wood down at a family unit. IT would likely fall under the more clever variety of monster. Rudel swiftly moved to the space above the orc, accelerating towards the ground as he used his sword to bisect it.

For a while now, he had stopped counting how many monsters he had taken down.

As the orc split vertically spurted blood, Rudel was bathed in it. Seeing that form, the family who had been attacked raised a greater scream as they ran off.

The left arm he had extended in an attempt to assist them, before he noticed it, Bennet had approached and grasped it.

“What are you doing? The cleanup isn’t over yet.”

“But we have to ensure their safety.”

“In the time you spend saving a single family, many more residents will die. They fled up the path we cleaned up and came down, their probability of survival is high.”

The family that ran off without lending an ear was already out of sight.

“We can leave the monsters outside town to Keith and Heleene, but we’re the only ones who can take on the monsters who came in.”

Seeing off Bennet, who commenced movement after leaving only those words Rudel grit his teeth. He understood it in his head. But when it was actually before his eyes, he had some hesitation. Beginning his movement a little late, he caught up with Bennet, who had lowered speed.

“Get it in your head, the more you waver, the more people will die. And that is the extent of your strength. If you want to save them, you have to become stronger.”

“... Yes.”

Saying that as Rudel caught up, Bennet accelerated again. In order to follow, Rudel raised his speed. While desperately keeping on her tail, Rudel watched her back.

She had already used up all the boomerangs she shouldered, and she didn't have my throwing knives left. But that didn't lower the speed she took them down. It just went to show how diverse she was.

At the same time, she wasn't using any unnecessary power. Her movement and attacks gave off the impression she was only using the minimum necessary. To Rudel, it looked like he was watching a professional work.

In contrast, Rudel's means of attack were limited. As they were in the middle of town, he couldn't use magic. When attacking on the move, the accuracy would fall, and if the magic of the needlessly powerful Rudel failed, it would incur damages onto the area.

If he had Sakuya, the damage would become something severe.

(Sakuya, me and you, we've got a long ways to go.)

Bennet kicked away an orc before his eyes, sending a number of goblins tumbling down alongside it. Perhaps she had inserted her kick into a vital, as the orc showed no signs of moving. She had run out of throwing knives, now holding a dagger in each hand, changing to a dual-wielding style.

With that, her movements only grew sharper.

Even when approaching an enemy was when one's movements were supposed to require the greatest amount of caution.

"Just right. Rudel, I'll show you by example. Burn it into your eyes."

As the two of them landed on a rooftop, Bennet ordered Rudel to watch before jumping down. While there were monsters fearful of the combat prowess she had shown, perhaps seeing her form, there were some who misunderstood her as weak, as they began to flock.

Her appearance was that of a young girl, a weak one at that. Even if a few of them had comparatively good heads on their shoulders, there was a limit to that. In regards to the monsters coming at her, Bennet showed no panic.

In the next instant, after she had lightly jumped twice on the spot, to Rudel, it almost looked as if she had disappeared.

Immediately activating his magic eyes, Rudel traced her movements. It was a

speed no different from his own, perhaps even slower, but rather than his emergency bursts, her movements were smaller.

For all the speed he had, Rudel couldn't help but make his movements large, and it was here the difference was coming out. There was no waste in each step she took.

By the time he realized it, the surrounding monsters had been cleaned up.



Meanwhile, Eunius and the others who were to prioritize the protection of the townsfolk were protecting the evacuees from monsters.

The largest building in town was apparently a fort built up ages ago.

"Goddammit, there's no end to them."

Cutting down two monsters with his great sword, a blood-stained Eunius used a cloth to wipe off his face. That had been the last of the monsters who'd approached.

But even so, given just a bit of time, the monsters would group and attack again.

Climbing onto the surrounding buildings, Millia used sound to notify them whenever monsters were approaching. She could handle a bow, and they were thankful she could take the stragglers down from that position.

"Eunius, switch out with me."

"Are you stupid? I can't use a lick of magic. You stay at the entrance and continue with magic support."

Returning Aleist to his original post, Eunius observed Millia and Izumi. No problems with Aleist. In front of the building the townsfolk had evacuated into, there was a small courtyard. As they could use magic there, then it was easy to defend against monsters of this level.

"Even so, if we didn't happen to be there, what did that cute captain plan on doing... well, she's got her dragon, so I'm sure it'd work out."

He shifted his eyes to Izumi. Millia was keeping wary of the surroundings. There didn't seem to be any particular problems on her side, but Izumi's

exhaustion was severe.

Apart from battle, she was put to looking after the residents who'd evacuated. Eunius would treat them too roughly, and with Millia, there were some race-related problems.

More than anything, Aleist was unreliable in these sorts of things. As a result, the burden was placed on Izumi.

Calming the townsfolk in chaos, and be that as it may, she still dealt with the monster attacks. The enemies came in numbers too great, and even Aleist's magic wasn't able to completely deal with them.

"The uniform of a high knight really is effective."

The fact Izumi was a high knight had an effect, more or less. Of course, from the townsfolk's point of view, it wasn't as if they understood her affiliation. They decided by appearance that some splendid knight was talking.

Aleist and Eunius were in civilian clothing, and the defenders' uniform didn't look much different from that of the rank and file to begin with.

But even with Izumi persuading them, the residents continued to riot, making it even worse in nature. There was a merchant-esque man who demanded they go out to save his child left behind. Because his wife died, there was a man who rushed out saying he would die as well.

Eunius felt an anger he had nowhere to place as he thought of how he would fulfill the job before his eyes.

Chapter 127: Bennet's Job

By the time it was all over, two villages were wiped off the map, and a town was half-destroyed.

Thinking of the situation when they came, the dragoons who had prevented the situation from worsening were worthy of praise, but that wasn't a tale of the outskirts, it was one of the central capital.

From the townsfolks' point of view, a large number of monsters had suddenly flooded into the area where they were peacefully living their lives. The numbers easily exceeded a thousand. The soldiers protecting the town had perished, and the villages the monsters passed through were annihilated.

When the night opened up and noon was almost upon them, the monster cleanup had finally been completed. To be more precise, the final checks began around dawn, and they were finally completed at noon.

The monsters had been taken care of before the sun rose.

"It really is amazing."

Izumi tossed a monster corpse into the hole piled up with other bodies like it, pulling back as she watched Heleene fill the pit with a fiery breath.

"We have to clean up quickly, after all. When it comes to these things, having a dragon makes it go much faster."

Even if they didn't have enough people, as long as they had a dragon they were a match for a thousand, Izumi had witnessed a dragoon's ability. Not flustering before over a thousand monsters, they finished their work in a day. The monsters who had fled upon the arrival of a dragoon were all wiped away by Keith. It wasn't as easy as it sounded.

"Keith... Lieutenant Keith is quite something too."

"While you might hate him, that guy does his job. I'd like him to be that earnest on a regular basis, but as long as you properly do your work, our organization's much laxer than the high knights."

As Izumi stood in conflicted sentiment, two of the robed, masked knights appeared. The horses they led along looked to be a size larger than the others. Izumi stood on guard, but Bennet held up a hand and began talks.

“Is there anything else?”

“No, as expected of the dragoons, is all we wanted to say. We’ve got much to think over in this incident as well.”

“I see, then you can return to your job. The knight brigades should arrive within a few days.”

Keith had already made off to report; the knights would soon rush in. But it was hard to say how much supplies they would bring with them.

As it was a territory near the border, and there was some money invested into its military. If it was a territory out of danger’s way, then local armies and militia would serve well enough, but the feudal lord who reigned over the town possessed his own knight brigade.

“The least we could do is offer our thanks. Well then...”

After lowering their heads, the two knights mounted their horses. As they did, the horses’ heads changed to those of eagles, and their front legs to a bird’s as well. Only their back halves remained in a horse state.

When they took to the air, Heleene glared at them.

“You can’t eat them, Heleene.”

The dragon sent a single roar into the sky, and the hippogryphs hurriedly soared out of sight.

“Who are they?”

“Yeah, well... they’re folks without a name.”

Izumi mulled over whether she should ask any further, but Bennet made a troubled face, so she decided to leave it at that. While they were talking, Rudel approached. But their expressions were a little confused.



When Bennet came to the plaza, she found Eunius there, quite fed up. Sitting

on a wooden crate, a sleepy look on his face.

All the knights had worked through the night. The fatigue from unfamiliar work was also coming out.

“What’s wrong?”

“To hell with what’s wrong! Why didn’t you come sooner!? The town’s a mess is it not!? I’ll let you know I’ve got a wide face around the capital.”

The merchant-esque man was perhaps speaking as a representative of town. With his connections in the center, his attitude remained large before a knight.

Bennet knew this was going to be a pain, but she didn’t show it on her face. Her tail simply dropped powerlessly in exhaustion.

In the corner of her eye, she could see Aleist wrapped in a reed mat with his mouth gagged in cloth. While he was desperately trying to cry something out, she couldn’t understand what he wanted to say. But having received an explanation from Rudel along the way, she had a general grasp of the situation.

“You might think you’ll receive some sort of medal for saving us, but I’ll definitely never let it happen!”

“Is that so. In that case, do what you want. The knight brigade should be coming in the near future, so we’ll stick around to guard you until then.”

Bennet didn’t seem to pay it any mind, and after dealing with the representative man, she called everyone to follow. Aleist alone was taken off over Eunius’ shoulder.

All the gazes that fell upon the party came from unfavorable eyes. It was only natural. When they had suffered such casualty and loss, these folks would sit back in the center, showered in medals and rewards. When they imagined it, they couldn’t help but feel irritated.

“Major, in this case, I was nothing but a hindrance. So I don’t deser—”

Feeling the eyes of the townsfolk, Rudel suggested he would turn down the rewards. But Bennet shook her head. After they had separated from the residents, she explained to him.

“They’re not giving a medal for your sake alone. This is a medal granted for

the frontier. You guys better remember that too.”

Making a tired face, Millia seemed perplexed. Perhaps that explanation didn’t satisfy her as she opened her mouth.

“What’s that supposed to mean? If they’re giving out medals and rewards, shouldn’t they use those funds for restoration?”

“That’s the right way to look at it. It’s so righteous it’s bringing tears to my eyes. If that was possible, we wouldn’t have any troubles.”

Bennet explained how in the territory on the border, there was the feudal lord’s own knight brigade alongside some dispatched forces. They were one of the dispatchments. And when it came to the territory, that was the feudal lord’s responsibility. To be more precise, Bennet’s dispatchment hadn’t received a request, so they were under no obligation to save them.

However, she didn’t have the option of not saving them. It was precisely because they possessed the large powers called dragons that such a thing would never be permitted of a dragoon. If she overlooked it, then blame might even be attached.

Dragoons were the heroes of Courtois. But Bennet didn’t think of herself as a hero. For the sake of the country, she played the part of the ideal dragoon.

Her expression distorting, Millia shifted her gaze from Bennet, so Eunius explained in her place. Placed in a position where he had to use people, Eunius knew.

“... This might sound cruel, but if they don’t give out medals or praise anyone, no one’s going to move. Meaning it’s about profit. The country is the one profiting from it. Territory management is the feudal lord’s responsibility. Originally, the law states that the knight brigade and soldiers were supposed to deal with it. But the borderland also has knights stationed by the country for national defense. Well, I’m sure the situation’s special this time, since those guys were here as well.”

Bennet took over Eunius’ explanation. Those guys referred to the knights in the masks. Those who specialized in covert operations. Not wanting to talk too much about them, Bennet retook the conversation a little forcefully.

“If they commend us, then of the surrounding territories, some will start to send aid. Willingly at that. On top of selling a favor to this territory, this tale will become the talk of the area. The folks who want to put on airs will gather.”

Once Bennet arrived at the tent they set up for camp, everyone took a seat. Izumi was already at her limit, her complexion was taking a bad turn. The way Rudel worried for her looked considerably cute. But Bennet spoke on for her subordinate and his comrades.

“Just because you saved them, there’s no guarantee everyone will be thankful. It’s more often that demi-humans will find themselves discriminated against.”

As she took a fleeting glance at Millia, Millia averted her face. Along the way, she heard that the representative man insulted Millia, angering Aleist.

“But if we didn’t come, they would’ve been annihilated, right? They got in the way when we were fighting, and even if we save them, they spout off complaints.”

Finally freed, Aleist gave an irritated rebuttal to Bennet. He didn’t understand why they’d be insulted when they saved them. Bennet recalled her experiences from when she was a new recruit, for some reason thinking back on them warmly.

“That’s how it works. Or could it be you seriously thought you would be praised and lifted up as a hero? Lining nothing but pretty words won’t help them live their lives. Show a bit of understanding.”

The anger they had nowhere to place, they slammed it against who was available. This was the result of going through such troubles and risking their lives to protect them.

“Then what’s the point of sa...”

While Millia brought her mouth that far, she couldn’t say the rest. She couldn’t see the value in going as far as to be insulted to save them. And she had no such obligation.

With a haggard face, Izumi asked Bennet.

“Major Bennet, what do you think of it?”

Bennet gave an immediate response. Within her, that was an unwavering fact.

“My? In my case, it’s simple. I do it because it’s my job.”

Based on how they were taken, those were cold words.



As they waited for the lord’s knights to arrive, Millia assisted Rudel and the others in restoration work. They moved the collapsed buildings and rubble blocking the paths.

Those works could generally be left to the dragons, so Millia helped the men out on patrol.

“What about Izumi?”

“She was sent around to the food lines. It would be harsh for the Major alone.”

She spoke with Rudel. Normally, Millia would’ve been put on the food lines as well, but cooking was her weak point. What’s more, she was well aware she would lower the efficiency of the work. Because of that, Millia was patrolling with Rudel.

Aleist and Eunius were currently on break and asleep. It was a town that had just suffered tragedy, but if they let their guards down for a moment, the bandits would gather.

There were also those who might try something strange. In order to put checks on those sorts, it was their duty as knights to keep watch, or so Bennet taught them.

“Even so, little by little, people are starting to help out.”

Each time they looked over town, the number of residents who had begun clearing away Ruble increased ever so slightly.

While there were people whose occupations weren’t an absolute necessity, once they finished clearing up, they opened up shop. A bakery they passed by

was distributing bread to people free of charge.

“Oh, if it isn’t the knights. Take this with you.”

The well-bodied proprietress of the bakery handed a brown sack of bread to Millia and Rudel. There were loaves of freshly baked bread lining the front of the store, and while the inside still seemed to be a mess, there was a white smoke rising from the chimney.

“Eh? But...”

While Millia made a troubled face, Rudel paid it no mind and accepted the offer.

“Thank you.”

“Hahaha, just a bit of thanks for saving us. Why not come over some day to make a purchase?”

“I definitely will.”

Holding up the bag of freshly baked bread, Rudel gave a response to make one think he really would come again. Millia had been around him for a considerable amount of time, and she saw that part of him hadn’t changed.

As they walked, Rudel started into the continuation of the previous conversation.

“This is what the Major said, but an empty stomach thins the heart. That’s why meals are so important. Once they have some leisure, their bodies will move.”

“Yet you move even without the leisure. Aren’t you pushing yourself too hard?”

Millia worried for Rudel, who had continued moving for the past few days without rest. But the man in question was too sturdy for that, and gave a smile.

“I can go on!”

“Hah, whatever.”

As she breathed out a sigh, the two of them took a seat on the wreckage of a collapsed building. The sun had come to a high point in the sky. It was quite

probably noon. As they sat side by side, eating the bread they're received, the town women who passed by clicked their tongues.

Looking down, Millia recalled the insults she received a few days ago. The representative man told her, a demi human shouldn't stick in their mouth, they need only work until they die. The fact there were still people like that around saddened her.

It felt as if she'd been shown a clear delineation.

"Don't mind it. The Major said nothing starts with mulling."

"I know that. But there are some things that get to the heart."

Stuffing his face with breath, Rudel consoled Millia. Gazing at the spot where she and Rudel sat, she felt there was a clear delineation there as well. As he gulped water from the flask hung at his waist, Rudel had already finished his meal.

When Millia tried to eat the bread in her hands, a single young boy entered her eyes. From the shadow of a tree in their line of sight, he seemed to be peering at them. Perhaps Rudel was waiting for Millia to finish eating, as he was looking at the sky without noticing the boy. No, while he did notice, it's possible he was just ignoring him.

No matter how you looked at him, the boy was still young. Wary that even a kid like that would say something against her, her eye met with the boy, who would occasionally pop out his head. There, the boy frantically hid himself.

Finishing up her bread, Millia tried to leave at once. She had no obligation to hear out his complaints, but as she stood, the boy hurriedly leapt out of the tree's shadow.

"We're going."

"No, it looks like he's got some business with you, Millia."

Rudel noticed the boy look at her with straightforward eyes, grasping Millia's hand as she tried to depart. There, the boy glared at Rudel.

While Millia made a displeased face, Rudel seemed somewhat amused. He didn't seem to be an ill-natured boy, so he surely had some sort of reason.

Thinking that, Millia turned her whole body towards him.

“Something wrong?”

“U-um...”

The boy looking down held both his hands behind his back. The way she was looking down over him couldn't be helped from his height.

There, the boy brought the hands he kept behind to the front. Millia readied herself for a knife, but what she found instead was a bouquet of flowers, wrapped in the brown paper the bread was distributed in.

They were flowers that grew around the area, by no means difficult to reach, but the boy who seriously collected them's face turned red. Once he'd gone so far, Millia understood as well. Leaning down to match the boy's eye level, she accepted the bouquet.

“... Are you sure you want to give them to me?”

“Y-yeah.”

The young boy couldn't look her in the face, looking to one side.

“Thank you.”

“You saved me, so... I have to say thank you.”

As he watched over the two of them, Rudel was all smiles. With a conflicted psyche, Millia stared at Rudel. There, the boy took off running, his face a bright red.

Along the way, he turned around and yelled at Millia.

“I-I love you!”

“Say what!?”

Never expecting it to go as far as a confession, Millia was surprised. While Rudel watched her expression change with a grin, the boy had something to shout at Rudel as well.

“And I hate youuuuu!”

Watching the boy run off screaming he hated him, Rudel was surprised as well. Millia looked at Rudel like that and burst into laughter.

Sha laughed and laughed, and perhaps she had laughed too hard, as her tears came out, and she wiped them with her fingertip. While Rudel was also laughing at the end, Millia grew curious, so she ended up asking.

“Could it be you knew he was going to confess?”

“Yes, when he making such serious eyes, I’d notice whether I wanted to or not. And wait, you never noticed? Millia, you can be a bit dense.”

“I don’t want to hear that from you!”

Being called dense from the densest of them all, Millia cried out in a voice that resounded through town.



When they returned to the tent where they camped out, they found Aleist and Eunius cleaning up after the food lines. They were washing the cooking utensils nearby the tent. They looked quite sleepy.

They had probably started helping out as soon as they woke.

“You two are late. Did something happen?”

When Eunius said that to Rudel with a broad grin, Aleist was flustered. He looked at Rudel and Milia with worried eyes, but Rudel...

“Yeah, Millia was confessed to. The one who confessed mistook me as her boyfriend because I was nearby.”

As Rudel said that with a laugh, Aleist held his head. Rudel couldn’t understand what he did wrong, so he looked at Eunius. There, Eunius shook his head.

“You don’t have to worry about it. Rather, it’s best you don’t do anything.”

He knew Aleist loved Millia from their student days. While he wanted to do something to help out, it was his weak field, so he decided not to stick in a hand.

“I-I see.”

Millia was also making a conflicted face, but it would be bad to confuse Rudel with any unneeded help, or so she remonstrated herself. Having heard the

voices, Bennet appeared from inside the tent.

“You’re late, you two. The soup’s gone cold, so I’ll put it on the fire again.”

“No, we’re fine with it like that.”

Rudel refused, not wanting to cause Bennet any trouble. But Bennet rejected that refusal.

“I’m doing it to make sure you properly do your work. So return the favor by working it off.”

“... Thank you. Major, if I may?”

“What is it?”

As she walked off to warm the soup, Bennet turned around to look at Rudel.

“To you, what is your job?”

Having thought about his work ever since then, Rudel wanted to ask about her sense of values when it came to working. Otherwise, he would see Bennet as the sort of person who only helped people because it was her job.

He couldn’t find an answer himself, so he asked her directly.

“It’s nothing to think so hard about. But, if I had to say... it’s how I live my life.”

Rudel thought a bit before giving a satisfied not. It was an answer he was satisfied with. He knew that Bennet didn’t say it was work with cold-hearted thoughts.

“Thank you.”

“Hmm, to rejoice over hearing such a thing, you really are an idiot.”

When Bennet turned to walk off, her tail was delightfully waving from side to side. Leaving Aleist-still holding his head-to the side, Eunius walked over to Rudel and watched Bennet’s back as he struck up a conversation.

“Even when we were just a hindrance, perhaps Ms. Major brought us along for our ... no, for you and Aleist’s sake.”

While Eunius called Bennet Ms. Major, it didn’t seem to be out of sarcasm. He

had recognized her in his own way.

“... You might be right.”

Rudel looked at Bennet’s back as he agreed. Unlike them, Bennet had graduated the academy on the two-year curriculum. From a situation where she didn’t even have a knight’s qualifications, she had gotten a dragon to recognize her and climbed up the ranks.

If Rudel and the others were elites, then Bennet really was a self-made soldier.

“When she’s got her troubles, she’s good at looking after people.”

Rudel and Eunius understood why Bennet went out of her way to bring them. She wanted to show them where it all happened. Not only out of good will, with their unstable positions, there was no telling when Rudel and Aleist would rise up the ranks.

It would be troubling if they rose without knowing anything, or perhaps she had calculated so. But that wasn’t all, the two thought.

“I’m proud to have her as my superior officer.”

On Rudel’s boast, Eunius laughed and joked.

“I want one at my place too. Hand her over.”

“Hell no.”

While the two of them were exchanging jokes, Aleist held his head in serious thoughts. Millia looked perplexedly over the three men.

A few days later, switching out with the first dispatchments of knights, Rudel returned to the port town of Beretta.

Around that time, Aleist ended up in a petty quarrel with the boy in love with Millia.

Chapter 128: The Major and Aleist

After returning to the port town of Beretta, Rudel spent his days with Izumi, comforting a depressed Sakuya.

Within all of that, Rudel made a small shield of light over his right hand and thought. The shield that wasn't even ten centimeters twirled over the palm of his hand.

Sitting down and gazing at the shield, Rudel had made some break time in front of Sakuya's den, repeating a similar practice every day. At this point, he was even able to produce a shield of light from the tips of his toes.

While he tested it on Bennet's suggestion, it was surprisingly easy. More so, he could only be perplexed at why he had always fixated on his left hand.

"Even so, I want some more cards to play."

Bennet's fighting style was one thing, but Rudel also wanted to secure Keith's piloting methods. When he started to look at it like that, he began to see what he was lacking. The sword and magic were insufficient. He couldn't help but think so.

Bennet was a demi-human of the wolf tribe, and she compensated for her lack of magic with an abundance of attack methods. Rudel knew that.

He had tried out the boomerang, but it didn't feel right in his hands. His admiration for Bennet only made that all the more irritating.

"Then is it throwing knives after all?"

Once he had thought that far, Izumi appeared as per usual with a bag she held in both hands. It contained a midday meal and drink.

"Are you thinking of something again? If you plan to concoct another special move, if possible, I'd like to ask you to stop."

While Izumi sent him a bitter smile, Rudel couldn't understand why she was against it. However, at that moment, he wasn't thinking up a special move, so for now, he nodded.

“No problem. Right now, I’m thinking up new means of attack. Just like the major, I’d like a means of mid-range attack apart from magic.”

Izumi lined up the food she took from the basket on a rock in front of Rudel as she listened in.

“I don’t think there will be any problem with your mana, Rudel. Even if you’re not on Aleist’s level, you’re definitely on the more plentiful side.”

“I definitely have a bit...”

His words growing muddled, Rudel extended a hand to the food before his eyes. There, he felt Izumi’s skill in cooking had risen from before.

“This is good. Have you been practicing?”

“Thank you. It’s all because of Bennet-san. That person can do everything, after all.”

Generally omnipotent in housework, and first rate as a knight and dragoon. She was an admiration to both Rudel and Izumi.

“I’m glad I came to the outer reaches. I’ve got two proficient superiors to look up to.”

When Rudel said that satisfactorily, Izumi gave a powerless nod.

“Yeah. You’re right. Bennet-san is a good person. Yeah. But...”

Izumi couldn’t bring herself to recognize Keith, and Rudel directed her a perplexed face. He didn’t think the man had any particular problems. To Rudel, they were both admirable superior officers.

“Anyways! How are things on your end? Bennet-san was delighted, said you had grown a bit.”

Matching Izumi’s change of topic, Rudel washed down the sandwich in his mouth with tea before responding.

“I’ve got a long way to go. I’ve got to work on the finer details. And using magic while on the move is still a bit... in that case, how about I deploy magic before moving? Keep it deployed at a set distance from me at all times?”

Suddenly hitting on something, Rudel sunk his thoughts into the sea. Izumi

watched over him with a warm smile.



Among the members Keith was to deliver to the palace, Aleist's party was not included.

"You really aren't going back?"

"Yeah. I have a bit of a place I have to go."

His words growing muddled, Aleist had seen Rudel training every day, and after the recent monster attack, he thought over it.

As a result, for a while, he wanted to go on a journey.

"The captain has us with him, so it'll be fine."

While the members of his platoon gave large nods, the man in question could only breathe out a sigh and watch. Normally, he would decline, but the girls said they would tag along and wouldn't listen to anything else.

"Well, I'm returning so that's all well and good. I'll hand a letter to your superior, but what do you plan to do from now on?"

Eunius didn't seem particularly worried, but if possible he wanted to return together. For some reason, he made an unpleasant face when he looked at Keith. On the contrary, Keith seemed pleased.

"Fufufu, a trip through the sky alone with Eunius-kun."

"Hold it. Aren't you after Aleist?"

"You two look like you're having fun."

When Aleist said that, Eunius made a truly incomprehensive face. From Aleist's point of view, in both the game and this world, Keith's impression as a good, reliable person was too strong. He couldn't even imagine him being after him.

"Now let's enjoy our journey over the clouds!"

"Oy, get any closer and I'll cut you! I'm serious!"

"Y-you're serious... what a passionate proposal. Then I must answer to those steamy feelings!"

“Gyaaah! Stay away!”

The water dragon Spinnith spread out his wide wings and lifted into the sky. His figure was truly beautiful.

After seeing off the dragon that flew with a ruckus on its back, Aleist turned and looked at the women who made up his platoon. In order to inform them of his future plans.

“There’s a large town nearby, and I’m thinking of heading there. We have to get someone to look after the holy sword we obtained, and more than anything, we’ll be able to operate out of there for a while.”

There were plenty of monster hunting jobs to be found around the border with ample facilities to tend to weapons and armor. His own armor was also being worked on by a craftsman in those parts.

Why wasn’t Aleist returning with Eunius? It was because Aleist had reached his own sort of answer in regards to his strength.

Aleist had thought about his strength. He knew he couldn’t catch up if he went at it the same way as Rudel and the others.

He wasn’t the same sort of lunatic, and it wasn’t as if his technique was particularly high. A magic talent he could never master wouldn’t even serve as borrowed plumes.

But... there was something he could do.

(This isn’t a game, but I can’t think of anything else. Power is power. I have to do what I can...)

What he recalled was his conversation with Bennet. When Aleist returned to Beretta, he heard from Rudel she was dreadfully strong. If she really was that strong, or so he and Eunius tried asking her.



“What are you supposed to do to become strong?”

“Y-yes.”

Bennet was short in stature, practically a little girl, yet before her, Aleist stood

troubled. No matter how he looked at it, she looked like a girl standing on her tip toes to talk to him and he felt his face would grow slack. While he somehow managed to endure it, Eunius just gave up and called her Bennet-chan.

While the girl's expression didn't show any signs of minding it, her tail would droop powerlessly. And while she clearly did seem to mind it, even that was cute as well.

"If you could establish something like that, we wouldn't have our troubles. Even if, hypothetically, there was a definite method, our prerequisites are far too different. What I know is no guarantee."

What Bennet was trying to say was that while she could give advice, she wouldn't take responsibility for it. Even with Rudel, who she was tasked with watching, she said she was just accompanying him every day to confirm his results. From what Aleist could tell, he didn't think that would make him strong, but for now, he wanted to catch up to Rudel as much as possible.

While Luecke and Eunius had grown in their areas of expertise, all he had done was cleaning. He was beginning to panic.

Perhaps sensing Aleist's impatience, Bennet decided to try helping him out. Borrowing an open room of the station, she talked to him one on one.

"It's not like I'm your superior. I can't give you any orders, and I can't take responsibility. You'd best get that in your head."

"Yes ma'am."

Giving a vague response, Aleist sat across from Bennet as she put out a drink. He did his best to convey his own panic and anxiety.

Avoiding any game terms, he told it so Bennet could understand. But Bennet made a perplexed face.

"Then what are you worrying about?"

"Eh? But..."

"If you know the means to become strong, What reason could you have not to use it?"

"I... don't have one. But it feels a bit cowardly, or unrealistic, or rather, in my

head, I don't accept that it'll work. Even if I say I'll get stronger the more monsters I beat, doesn't that sound a bit wrong?"

Speaking in game terms, by defeating monsters, he'd gain experience points and level up. But it's not like he could see something like his own status.

For some reason, Aleist was beginning to grow embarrassed. Even seeing his reddened face, Bennet didn't laugh.

"... Talks of defeating monsters to become strong, you can find them anywhere. In the place I was born, a man's rite of passage was monster hunting. There was a superstition that you steal the strength of the life you take away, but I do get the feeling it will make you stronger. It's not a complete lie."

Rather than becoming stronger from the monster slaying itself, Bennet thought that by beating them, you would gain combat experience and courage.

Having depended on his game knowledge and failed, Aleist had once bid them a complete farewell. But everyone around him was growing strong, and even if he wasn't there, wouldn't Courtois be just fine? He tried to convince himself too. But he couldn't stand the feeling he was being left behind. At the same time, he had gotten around to thinking he wanted to stand shoulder to shoulder with Rudel.

But it was that moment, he realized he didn't have anything of his own. What he wished for was inexhaustible mana, and social status. While both of them had become Aleist's power, they weren't his own. That's precisely while his close friends who climbed up with their own power looked radiant in his eyes.

"This might sound cruel, but in the end, power's just power, nothing more, nothing less. If I were you, I'd seek out that power without hesitation. I don't see any particular problems with your methodology. No problem at all. No, as a knight, it'll be bad if you don't report to your commanding officer."

"Ah, right, there's that. I've been doing so much cleaning these days, I've stopped thinking of myself as a knight."

While Aleist turned his head down in a powerless laugh, Bennet gently called over to him.

"You're the black knight. Hold your head up high."

“Y-you’re right.”

“I’ve heard about you from Rudel. I know you’re not a bad person, but you worry too much. Just make it simple... there’s no point in just having power. The problem’s how you use it. If there’s something you want to accomplish, you gain power for it.”

When he thought of what he wanted to, Aleist reached the conclusion he would definitely need more power than what he had now. He could no longer think that just because those around him were strong, he could just leave it to them.

“Will I be able to do it?”

But Bennet wouldn’t reassure him.

“Who knows?”

Bennet looked at Aleist and told him that was for him to decide.

“It is when you master your strength that it finally becomes your own. And if you fear you’ll drown in your power, then fret not. The reason being...”



Recalling Bennet’s words, Aleist began walking.

But turning back once to look at the port town, he grew envious of Rudel. Ever since he was enlisted in the defenders, all he had ever been taught was cleaning. The difference in environment between him and Rudel, from the eyes of those around, perhaps it might look as if he was being given preferential treatment.

But thinking of his own growth, Rudel had the better circumstance.

“I want a superior like that too...”

Additionally, he did have some lingering regret with Millia, but there were no particular developments in that field. While he tried calling out to her, things never went as he wanted. He would end up speaking so naturally his subordinates around him couldn’t even bring themselves to believe he really was smitten with her.

“If I drown in my power, then Rudel and the others will stop me, eh... friends sure are nice.”

Bennet’s final words... if Aleist was ever going to step off his path, his friends would come to stop him. Sure enough, Rudel and Eunius... and Luecke would probably stop him.

His other friends from his school days had saved him all the way. The very fact he could think he wasn’t alone was a blessing to Aleist.

But when he thought of his friends gleefully charging at his power-drowned self, he felt a slight quiver. The battle maniacs Rudel and Eunius laughing as they swung their swords, while Luecke used him as a test subject, hammering in his magic, he could imagine it too vividly.

“What’s wrong, captain Aleist?”

As one of his subordinates called out in worry, Aleist forcefully made a smile and said he was alright.

To enact a game-type strengthening method, Aleist was walking again. Swearing he would never lose himself to his power...



In the mansion of the Arses House, Erselica was panicking.

A letter had come from her older brother Chlust, but the servants had thrown it away. IF Lena hadn’t discovered it by chance and brought it to her room, she would never have noticed.

The contents of the letter she unfolded right at the door darkened her face.

“This is... but, it can’t be...”

The letter from her brother stated he wanted precise and current information on the relations between nobles at the palace. While it seemed he was in a serious situation, Erselica didn’t have enough information to answer to her brother’s hopes.

With Chlust sent off to the border, the state of the Arses House only grew worse.

Thanks to the eldest son Rudel, she was occasionally called to parties, but at first, she and her parents avoided them. At this point, her parents would show themselves, but in order to ensure Erselica's marriage to a wealthy noble or merchant, she wasn't let out.

The prominent nobles were taking a wait and see approach to the Arses House's state of affairs. If Rudel took the archduke seat, they would approach, but the rumors of discord between him and his parents were experiencing a sudden spread. His father's attitude at the knight appointment ceremony was coming back to torment them.

Because of that, Erselica couldn't say she had a precise grasp of the current situation.

"What does it say?"

Sending a harsh look at the cheerful Lena, Erselica yanked her into the room.

Closing the door and fastening the lock, unlike Lena's or Rudel's room, the splendid room of an archduke's daughter was spread out.

"... Were there any other letters?"

"That's the only one I found. See, when I thought I'd roast some potatoes over the scrap paper, there was a letter inside."

Seeing Lena scratched her head and smile, Erselica felt irritated. While she knew Lena didn't have any ill intent, the contents of the letter suggested he had been sending letters for a while now. Meaning the servants were crushing his attempts to send them.

While the contents didn't go into the specifics, it was certain he required information urgently. Erselica took a deep breath before making a plea to Lena.

"I have a request."

"What's up?"

"If you see any of the servants throwing away any letters from Chlust, I want you to deliver them to me."

"I don't mind."

While Lena easily took up Erselica's request, the problems didn't end there. Erselica didn't have the connections to answer Chlust's demand. And even if she managed to receive his letters, it would be difficult for her to send them.

"Anyways, I have to somehow look into it... but..."

Even if she wanted to investigate, from the letter's contents, she understood it wasn't the sort of thing she could talk to people about so easily. What's more, the fact the letters hadn't been getting through made her imagine the worst possible scenario. Within the mansion, there was an individual preventing Chlust's letters from reaching her.

If they just wanted to crush Chlust, that wasn't a problem. Erselica saw it as a huge problem, but the real problem would be if they had seen through Chlust's actions

Holed up in her room, Erselica was in a situation where she couldn't do anything. There, Lena read through the letter she had dropped in confusion.

"Noble relations? I know someone who's really knowledgeable about that."
"W-who!?"

Lena's sudden statement caused Erselica to jump at her. It gave off the impression as if she was clinging onto Lena's tall build.

"No, if you just ask Luecke-san, you'll be able to find out most things. He's real knowledgeable."

"... Well yeah, I'm sure he knows."

Erselica was aware of Luecke of the Halbades House. Talks of engagement to Eunius of the opposing Diade House had come up. But generally speaking, the three lords held an antagonistic relation to one another. If possible, he was someone she wanted to avoid. More than anything, the fact he held a friendly relationship with Rudel made him someone she couldn't psychologically accept.

"I'll try asking next time. I'm getting a lot of letters from him these days."

"Wait, you mean to say you're pen pals?"

"We're not. They just keep coming in, and I respond to about one every ten letters. I'm no good with writing, you see. When I'm trying to write up a

response, the next one comes in, so I have to write something new.”

Seeing Lena laugh, Erselica didn't know what she was supposed to say. While there was a problem with Lena, she felt the problem lay with Luecke as well.

The story continued to flow without delay.

Chapter 129: The White Dragoon's Ability is?

A few months since Rudel was flown off to the outer reaches...

Above the water, a little away from the port town of Beretta, three dragoons were flying through the sky.

Izumi and Millia gazed upon the scene from a place overlooking the port. While it looked like they were flying in formation, they were fighting two on one.

The two blue dragons were flying circles around the white one. The white dragon that fought, pincered by two others, looked at a glance to be at a disadvantage.

"You think they'll be alright?"

While Millia seemed nervous, Izumi was worried. While she knew it was dangerous from the start, in order to measure their abilities, it was concluded there was no helping it.

If possible, it was something she wanted to avoid, but if it was something those three had agreed upon, then this wasn't a problem Izumi or Millia could stick their mouth into. The three dragoons enthusiastically took part in this combat.

"It'll be fine... probably."

"You're certain? Can you look me in the eye and swear it?"

Millia doubtfully sent a glance at Izumi. It wasn't as if Izumi didn't believe in Rudel, but she averted her gaze from Millia. Thinking of his current abilities, it wouldn't be strange if some sort of problem broke out.

Two on one. She wanted to believe he was alright.

When the two of them took their eyes off the battlefield, a light broke out over the water. That dazzling light caused the two of them to raise their arms to protect their eyes, and once the light died down, they looked at the dragons. There, they found the form of two dragons, going at it one-on-one.

That vision-stealing light must have been exceedingly troublesome for the three in an upfront confrontation.

“So the first one to fall was Spinnith!”

There was no mistaking it, the first ones down were the Keith and Spinnith team skilled in aerial battle. But it was questionable whether any of the others had the ability to do it.

“That can’t be!”

Shifting from the dragon’s movements, Izumi confirmed Spinnith had fallen into the sea. Bennet’s dragon Heleene was taking distance from Sakuya. But none of her long-distance attacks were reaching Sakuya.

Distance-wise, she was in range. But Sakuya remained unscathed.

Eventually, Sakuya began to give off light. While her roar reached all the way to Izumi’s ears, it was something the air vibrations conveyed to her entire body.

Noticing the disadvantage, Heleene, charged at Sakuya, bringing her all the way to sea level, only for the surface of the ocean to freeze over in an instant. It looked almost as if the water dragon was offering a place for Rudel and Bennet to fight.

“So she realized Bennet-san was at a disadvantage in the air.”

A portion of the water truly had been swiftly exchanged for an arena.

“There’s no helping it. No matter how faster they are, the time they can stay in the air is short.”

The two were more worried for Bennet than Rudel.



Before she could fall into the sea, Bennet leapt up onto a footing of ice.

Taking a stance with the wooden boomerang on her back, she checked left, right, and up. While she had confirmed he had sunken into the sea with Sakuya, it was unknown what direction Rudel would come from.

He wasn’t tempered so soft that sinking would be the end of him. He had already grown to the level where she couldn’t stand up to him in aerial battles.

Rudel was the sort who would keep at training the basics like an idiot. Therefore, she thought it would be fast as soon as he picked up the knack, but he had far exceeded Bennet's expectations.

"From where... below!"

As Bennet heightened her senses to keep wary of her surroundings, she suddenly turned her face straight down and hurriedly left from the spot.

Right after that, the ice was smashed, and a pillar of ice rose. While she was bathed in the seawater that gushed out, Bennet's expression didn't change. She concentrated to search for Rudel. There, she heard a slight sound, so she used her boomerang in place of a shield.

Regardless of the mana she flowed in to strengthen it, her gripping hand conveyed a grating sound to her. Determining it would break at this rate, she instantly discarded her boomerang, and tossed another one from her back at him.

The boomerang that spun fast enough to hum through the air gave chase to Rudel, but ended with no more than cutting up his own afterimage. The next instant, Bennet equipped the wooden daggers she kept at her waist in both hands. Crossing them, she caught the wooden sword Rudel lowered from right above her.

They were atop a chunk of ice bobbing in the waves, but at the impact of that attack, cracks spread from where she planted her feet. The ice as a whole took one large bob below the water before coming back up and stabilizing.

Bennet forcefully parted him, and as she corrected her stance, Rudel landed before her. She instantly sent a kick, but Rudel grabbed that leg in his left hand, throwing it off.

Correcting her positioning in the air, Bennet threw the dagger in her left hand. While Rudel deflected it, Bennet took a light hop on the ice.

It was something like a habit for Bennet, but as she would always enter high-speed movement right after, she had never come to recognize it as a weakness.

However...

(Crap.)

By the time she noticed it, Rudel had extended his left hand towards her face. Rudel had got her in his sight.

While she returned fire with her remaining dagger, the intense clash had her lose in brute force, and Bennet was beginning to be pushed back. In speed, power, and technique, Rudel had matured. When it came to the technique part, she could likely still win out, but that was no longer enough to bury in the other gaps.

Even as she moved her fastest, those sharp bolts of lights pursued to capture her. When she thought of her footing crumbling into smaller and smaller pieces, Bennet was losing all options besides an upfront conversation.

(My subordinate's grown... but I can't just lose here.)

Bennet opened her eyes wide, instantaneously accelerating to insert a kick in Rudel's stomach. But there, a small shield had manifested. Rudel took on Bennet's kick that had lost its momentum, jumping back, pretending to be blown away.

When she chased to close in the distance, Rudel tossed the sword in his hands at her. Entering hand to hand combat, they each fired a series of fist and foot. But both sides could do naught but capture the other's afterimage, and neither side was scathed.

From the eyes of a third party, they were surely too fast to perceive. Even if they could be seen, after Bennet fired a roundhouse kick with her right leg, they would've sworn they saw her left instead... it would surely cause such a misapprehension.

But that scuffle was also greeting its end. Unable to catch up to Rudel, Bennet received a blow to her abdomen knocking her off her feet. Correcting her stance as she rolled across the ice, she saw Rudel had stopped moving.

Right after, Bennet stood on the spot and tossed her dagger to the side. Raising her hands, she showed a pose of surrender.

"Once you've gone so far, I've no choice but to concede... it's your win, Rudel."

Above the surface of the ice, the swords of light gleamed in their numbers, as if to cover up the sky. Their points were directed at Bennet, and if they came at her from all directions, Bennet wouldn't come out unharmed.

As Rudel stood to his feet, the swords turned to grains of ice, fading out as they were swept away by the wind.

"Thank you. Major."

Her prided subordinate who had shown such results in such a short period gave a delighted smile. Bennet felt just a little lonely when she looked at his smile. She didn't have anything left to teach him. Perhaps he wouldn't look at her like a superior anymore she grew anxious for just a moment.

There, Keith who had crawled out of the sea sent a smile to Rudel, out of breath.

"N-nice fight."

"Thank you! Lieutenant!"

When Rudel hurriedly rushed to help Keith up, Keith continued to smile as he collapsed on the spot. He had pushed himself considerably.



The three dragons who'd returned were sopping wet.

At the port, the dragons climbed out and lied down. They had used up their stamina, so they were resting, but Sakuya alone was full of energy.

'And you see, you see, when Spinnith was coming at her, Sakuya decided it with a counter!'

Happily informing Izumi of her contributions, Sakuya made a fist and began shadow boxing. She was too energetic.

"I see, you worked hard too, Sakuya."

'That's right. I was punching it out with Heleene in the water too!'

The punched dragons looked at the energetic Sakuya and let out some large sighs. They looked worn out. But finally, Heleene...

'You lost to me in the water, dammit!'

Exhausted, on her side, it seemed Heleene was showing the backbone of the water dragons. From how Spinnith averted his face, though, it was quite likely he lost to Sakuya.

‘N-next time, I’ll use my sure kill one, two finish to...’
‘I can use that one too, you hear!’

Unable to imagine a punching match between dragons, Izumi could only give a bitter smile. In half a year, Rudel and Sakuya had defeated competent members of the dragoon brigade. It goes without saying that was due to their own training.

But it was also a fact they possessed latent abilities that high. The talent of Rudel, who had continued training his foundation like an idiot, was blooming as a dragoon.

The man in question lay down an unconscious Keith as he spoke to Bennet.

“Was it your idea to steal our sight with light?”

“No, my close friend Aleist said something of that effect, so I thought I might be able to do it, and practiced.”

Rudel had used a surprise flash to daze Keith, letting Sakuya defeated Spinnith while the dragon was unmanned.

“It wasn’t bad. If you’re able to coordinate it into your attacks, it’s effect will rise. And also...”

The two of them continued talking about the battle. They were both the epitome of seriousness, and Izumi gave up on entering the conversation. If Keith were awake, he might be able to.

But Bennet’s face grimaced.

“So you got me here too.”

Taking off her gloves, Bennet looked at the swelling on the back of her right hand as she muttered. While it didn’t seem to be broken, she had been injured in the midst of battle without noticing it.

“Major, I can use healing magic.”

“I see, then I’ll leave it to you.”

Bennet held out her right hand, and Rudel reached to grasp it. Seeing that scene, Millia was just a little jealous. But Izumi opened her eyes wide as she foresaw the development that was to follow.

(Rudel’s healing magic... hold it!)

Leaping out, Izumi grasped Rudel’s arm. Sakuya pestered Izumi to keep listening to her story, but there was something greater she had to stop. As she put some considerable force into gripping Rudel’s arm, the man was perplexed.

“Izumi, that hurts.”

“W-what’s wrong, Izumi?”

While Bennet was worried as well, Izumi looked into Rudel’s face. There, she confirmed just one thing.

“Rudel, when did you learn that healing magic?”

“Listen to this! The truth is, Mystith-sama personally taught it to me!”

“What sort of effect does it have?”

“What are you talking about? It’s healing magic, so of course it has a healing effect... ah, it’s also got a side effect of decreasing the pain usually felt during healing and—”

Once she had heard that much, Izumi put more power into her hold on Rudel’s arm. When she gripped it, water was squeezed from Rudel’s soaking wet clothing, and a grating sound could be heard. Izumi informed Rudel with a smile.

“Rudel.”

“Y-yes?”

“That is also banned.”

“Say what!?”

Rudel informed Izumi of how he had tested it on his colleague Enora, and how it definitely had a healing effect, but by no means would Izumi give him a nod. In her long relation with Rudel, this was the moment where Izumi’s instinct had

prevented the dangers of petting.

Unable to accept it, Rudel pleaded; he told her it definitely wouldn't hurt. But Izumi kept denying it saying that wasn't the problem.

"... Um, what about me?"

Bennet looked over the two of them, a troubled look on her face.



Rudel's colleague from the dragoon brigade, Luxheidt, had temporarily returned from his dispatchments station.

He needed to report, and he wanted to take some vacation. As a secret fan of Rudel, Luxheidt was also considering dropping by the port town of Beretta.

Stopping by the palace for the first in quite some time, the somewhat strained air he sensed was definitely not to his liking.

"It's quite tense here."

Holding his report, Luxheidt walked down a corridor of the palace when he happened to pass by a certain room used by the civil officials. There, he heard a delighted voice. Rather than a work room, it was a room used to take breaks.

'You did it, young master!'

'Vargas, I'm sure I told you to stop calling me that. Well, I'm in a good mood today, so I'll permit it.'

'But that girl really is a strange one.'

'Well it's surprising that she'd want to hear about noble relations. But with this, I can invite her out to tea!'

'Um, if that's what you want, then I guess that's fine.'

Hearing a conversation between subordinate and superior, Luxheidt mused it was a peaceful conversation as he hurried on.

At least the civil officials are at peace, he thought as he made for the dragoon captain office, but it was there that Luxheidt came to the understanding he wasn't one to talk. The reason being, there was a slip on the office notifying him they were in the middle of a meeting.

"Huh? I've never heard of a slip like this being on the office before."

It wasn't normal to have a meeting in the captain's office, it was normal to borrow a conference room. Luxheidt did consider coming back later, but it was there he heard a voice from the room.

Growing intrigued, he put his ear to the door to listen in. He had confirmed there was no one else in the corridor, and it was an action that came from pure curiosity.

And he would regret it.

'W-what... was that...?'

'I'm telling you, he's dangerous! My niece told me, Rudel has an absolute advantage when it comes to demi humans!'

'M-my brothers and sisters were saying the same thing!'

It seemed the captain and a few dragoons were discussing something. Rudel's name came out, so Luxheidt's interests welled. But the conversation rapidly strayed.

'Then that mean's Bennet-chan's in danger, does it not! That baster, I've got no interest in women, 's the sort of air he gave off, but he was actually aiming for this!'

'No, you're the one who sent him off to the border, captain! What are we going to do!? At this rate, the position of we who protect Bennet-chan are...'

'In his student days, he had a free pass into the girls' dorm, and he entered it boldly! For some reason it's highly classified information, and it was a real pain to look into! But Rudel-sama is a man of valor who's even managed to tame the tiger tribe!'

(Ah, looks like we're not ones to speak.)

Picking up on the contents of the conversation, Luxheidt felt like apologizing to those civil officials from before. There, a hand was placed on his shoulder.

When he turned, he found the vice-captain Alejandro standing with a dubious face. While he wanted to chastise Luxheidt for his actions, more than that, he worried over what Luxheidt was going to do, now that he had learned the secret of the dragoon brigade.

"You... heard?"

Looking at the vice-captain who would calmly send people off to borderland, Luxheidt broke into a cold sweat.

“...”

He knew it would be pointless to deny it here, and from the vice-captain's face, he knew he couldn't say anything foolish.

“Listen, don't tell anyone about what you've—”

“Vice-captain, I have an idea!”

From the vice-captain's behavior, Luxheidt sensed he had no particular fixation on Major Bennet and decided to take a gamble.

It would be a pain to be stationed any further away. Luxheidt proposed a plan to crush this secret gathering.



In Beretta, a summons from the palace came for Rudel and the other dragoons.

“Are they going to award us for that monster subjugation?”

“Yeah, I thought they'd just send something and that would be the end of it, but it seems they're handing it out at the palace.”

Bennet read over the letter as she confirmed Rudel and Keith's schedule. At present, there weren't any delays in the development of the port town. The construction using dragons was proceeding faster than anticipated.

Even if the three of them slipped out temporarily, there was little to worry about.

For Rudel, if he returned, he would be able to see Eunius and Luecke, so he thought he wouldn't be bored. Keith thought the same.

“The palace, eh... I can see the captain and vice-captain!”

Seeing Keith's delighted face, Rudel arbitrarily misinterpreted it as an immense admiration for those two great men. While he wasn't wrong, it was in a vaguely different direction.

But Bennet wasn't making a happy face.

“What’s wrong, Major?”

“No... it just seems I’m hated within the brigade, see. If I go, there will be some troubles.”

“That can’t be! You’re a splendid major!”

Rudel was convinced there was no way Bennet could be hated. He couldn’t believe someone like that could exist, so he decided to ask for a name.

“Just who could hate you, Major?”

“Rudel, you can’t ask something like that.”

When Keith cautioned Rudel, Bennet laughed a bit.

“Everyone’s got people they love and hate. I don’t mind it, so you don’t have to either.”

“... Understood.”

Bennet put a plan together and informed the two of their day of departure. With the changing schedule, she informed them they would have to work quickly for a while.

“You can take some vacation at the capital as well. Well, it’s not like we can’t fly through the night, but there’s no need to push yourselves.”

And so, they were given a day of vacation at the capital.

Chapter 130: Aleist's Harem

Aleist took a journey from the port of Beretta to a town near the border.

Taking up a merchant's request for guards, he made for his destination. They didn't have much leisure, time-wise, but even so, it was an action he had determined necessary.

His own platoon was composed of female knights and it wasn't as if everyone was suited for combat. A squad needed rear support as well. Perhaps the archeology enthusiast Pasette Yulineria was a good example. If it had to be stated, she possessed most of the functions of a thief.

Starting with trap evasion, she was skilled in disarming locks as well. They were techniques she had taken up in the process of aiming for the beloved archeologist path she desired, and it wasn't as if she aspired to rob anyone. Her skillset was merely on the thief side of the spectrum.

Draped over her green coat, her leather bags stowed many more tools than weapons. She loved books, and she was a female knight with the sort of decisive power to just run out and get something done at the drop of a hat.

Inside the swaying carriage, she was trying to decipher the hero's journal she had gotten her hands on. As long as she had the time, she would look at the journal every day.

Aleist sat across from her. As she read through the passages again and again, he called over.

"Is there something special about that journal?"

In-game, it was no more than a single item, but when Pasette lifted her face from the book to look at Aleist, her cheeks flushed. While Aleist noticed the affection directed at him, he pretended not to notice.

"U-umm... it's... interesting?"

"Why did you make that a question?"

When Pasette thought of how her face was reddening, she sent him a troubled look.

“Because I’m not often understood. The other girls keep asking me what’s so fun about reading other peoples’ diaries.”

To Pasette’s bitter smile, Aleist could only mutter ‘I see’. He was making sure not to stick his mouth in problems between women. While this might not be the best way to put it, as long as they didn’t go too far, Aleist would ignore it.

He wasn’t trying to be heartless, his intervention would only create more problems. Whoever he helped would only be recognized as an enemy by the surroundings.

(Girls sure are scary. They make factions and... huh? Girls? Rather, aren’t they already adults?)

As Aleist looked at the journal, Pasette opened her mouth.

“Before the Kingdom of Courtois was formed, it was an era with small countries jumbled all over the place, and there were plenty of skirmishes. But this journals comes from a little before even that era. Because it details how the Gora were still wielding their fury across the lands.”

Hearing of Gora, Aleist tilted her head, so Pasette hurriedly offered an explanation.

“Gora are vicious monsters that live in the empire. There are legends they can grow as big as mountains, they have four arms, and back then, they were in Courtois as well.”

“They’re not anymore? (S-so there was such a scary monster!?)”

Having never heard of Gora, Aleist was a little startled, but he played serenity. Nodding, Pasette told him it was alright as she continued her explanation.

“Ever since the dragoons made their appearance, they were eradicated from the Courtois side. Since we have dragons, the Gora in the empire don’t wander over. That’s why the important people say they must be quite clever.”

“I-I see. (Thank god! Seriously, thank you!!)”

“At the time, they didn’t have a common language, so I can’t completely decipher it. There are words mixed in, or rather, the same sentence or word can have a different meaning. If we knew where exactly the owner of this journal came from, that would make things easier. Like you know how we have a

slightly different use of words in the south and north? It's like the dialects were stronger back then, and there are some things we'll never find out unless we can ask a local."

Seeing Pasette describe it so happily, Aleist recalled the self of his past life. He recalled his experience of the things he loved being belittled by others.

"... I'm sorry. It's not interesting, is it? Listening to this babble."

He loved games and he especially enjoyed playing fantasy ones. Even after he reincarnated, he could recall how it hurt his heart when his classmates called that creepy. It felt as if they were denying him as a person.

It would've been better if he had a friend who shared the same hobbies, but unfortunately, in his serious prep school, he was unable to find any gaming friends.

"No, I'll admit I don't get it, but I can understand you really like it. And looking into the past is kinda romantic, don't you think?"

"Romantic? You're the first to ever say something like that to me, captain."

The laughing Pasette's hair was fashioned into a ponytail. Her hair itself wasn't very long, so the tail portion was short. When she laughed like that she looked like a child, or so was Aleist's frank opinion.

After that, until it was time to change out guards, Aleist continued talking with Pasette.

And he thought...

(Yeah, they're all alive after all.)

"What's wrong, captain?"

"It's nothing."

In the past, even if they entered his field of vision, he thought of these characters who didn't appear in the game as little more than part of the mob, but like this, he could see full well they were living their lives. He had experienced this feeling once more after he left the environment of the academy, and he was beginning to develop an interest in the pasts of the people he'd encountered.

(Bennet-san is the same. And Rudel's sister of a different mother... Lena as well. I wasn't looking at my surroundings.)

He repented at how narrow his field of vision had been before he enrolled at the academy. And until his lookout shift came around, Aleist enjoyed conversing with Pasette..



By the time they reached their destination, the sun had gone down.

The caravan Aleist's platoon had taken up a request to protect arrived at a large town near the border. By Aleist's knowledge, as it was close to borderland and in the farther reaches of the kingdom, it was a town with a prospering weapon and equipment industry. Before searching for a weapon, taking care of the other equipment was important.

Generally, knights of Courtois would make use of their supplied weaponry, but the use of personal armaments was also recognized.

In the town that gave off an uncouth impression unfit for sightseeing, Aleist decided to search out an inn.

"For now, let's look for the inn they told us about. If they don't have any rooms, we should be safe if we take one on the slightly pricey side."

The female knights abided the orders of their superior Aleist. They all carried their own luggage as they made for the place the merchant had told them about.

Aleist thought they were wearing conspicuous clothing, but that didn't seem to be the case. There were many travelers passing through, and be that as it may, there were plenty wearing the same attire as them.

"Aren't there a few too many travelers around?"

When Aleist brought forth the question, Pasette walking immediately behind him gave an answer.

"It's because there are plenty of equipment craftsmen here. There are lots of merchants who come to stock up, or sell daily necessities."

Meaning they would need guards to accompany them. For merchants that

managed large-scale shops, it wouldn't be strange for them to have their own personal guards.

After Aleist nodded at that explanation, their destination inn came into sight. A sign near the door informed them there were vacant rooms. As they got closer, it even detailed the prices and the sorts of food they would offer if you took up a stay.

"Hmm... breakfast is included, and for dinner, you can use the restaurant on the first floor. What's more, it's a pretty place."

Personally, Aleist preferred a pretty inn with good service. Not only was he the young head of a noble, his past life was one of a high school student in modern Japan. Putting up with a cheap inn was close to impossible. Additionally, his subordinates were all women.

If it was possible, the best inn was one that wouldn't displease them.

The point of their dissatisfaction was directly tied to the atmosphere of the platoon, it was something Aleist had come to learn as of late.

When he was traveling with Eunius, he was technically traveling with the son of one of the three lords. If Eunius told them to stay at a cheap inn, they would keep their mouths shut and abide. This did not hold true for their captain Aleist.

"Looks nice. If it's got a bath, then I'm all for it."

"I can't complain if they're providing food."

"It's a bit on the expensive side, but we've been camping a lot, so I want to sleep in a fluffy bed."

Nobles, commoners, and demi-humans... the various members of the female camp used their own sense of values to give a favorable rating to the inn before their eyes. A commoner knight was just a little mindful of the price.

"Then it's settled, we're staying here. (Thankfully, it looks like we don't have to go around looking for another inn)."

If they didn't like it, even if they didn't complain to Aleist, the air of the platoon would take a turn for the worse. In-game, he made use of cheap inns when he was low on funding, but when he looked at reality like this, he was

reminded it wouldn't go so easily.

For now, he gave thanks to the fact they had found an inn before it grew dark as he led the party through the door.

As he opened the door, the nice smell from the dining hall on the first floor hit them. The smell of roasting meat, the scent of simmering soup... for his party worn out from their journey, it was exceptionally appealing.

"Welcome! Are you here for a meal or a stay?"

As the energetic poster girl of the place approached the party, Aleist confirmed to see if they had enough openings.

"So it's a party! We do have the openings, but singles rooms for everyone are a bit... if you're fine with doubles, I don't think there will be a problem."

When he turned to look at his subordinates' faces, everyone nodded. With hunger and fatigue, no one complained they would prefer to sleep alone. Rejoicing inside, Aleist told the young girl that would be fine and checked how much it would cost.

"If possible, a few days. Could you take us in for three days?"

"That's perfectly fine. If it was an extended stay, then if any singles rooms opened up, we wouldn't have minded if you moved into them."

Extended stay... then did that mean three days wasn't enough? Giving a bitter smile, Aleist told them they would book three days for now and paid the fee.

Moving from the entrance to the counter, the girl called out to the young man behind it.

"It's a party. They're staying three days, and for the room..."

The man handed the registry over to Aleist for him to write down names. As Aleist entered everyone's information, his movements were truly accustomed. Eunius threw these sorts of things right out the window, so they naturally flowed down to him. While it would be fine if he left it to his subordinates, their sense of values differed so greatly they would argue over choosing inns.

There was no helping it, so Aleist took on these sorts of tasks.

“I’ll show you to your room.”

Taking charge of the keys, the girl showed Aleist and his party to their rooms. From a number of customers, it seemed business was going well. After they were led to separate rooms scattered across different floors, Aleist was the final one led to a singles room on the fifth floor.

“This is the room the white knight once stayed in, you know.”

“The white knight? You mean Rudel?”

“Oh, you know him? He came to this town a few years ago. Back then, there were also a lot of dragons, and it was a huge ruckus in town. I was helping out back then and I accidentally entered the white knight’s room, but he was kind and cool.”

The reminiscing girl called her encounter with the white knight her pride. With a bit of a conflicted feeling, Aleist gave a bitter smile.



The next day.

Having finished breakfast Aleist’s party was moving independently, the day having been designated as a vacation.

They hadn’t had any rest to that point, and as this was a perfect opportunity, Aleist decided to walk through town on his own. Holding the cloth-wrapped holy sword under his arm, he searched for the eastern craftsmen who had produced his armor.

“Can they use this?”

He recalled it was registered as a material, but it didn’t give any particular effects. That’s why he saw the holy sword as little more than a meaningless item to fill up a bag space. But before the threat of the Gaia Empire, he wanted as proficient a weapon as he could find.

Not just for himself to hold, he needed to assemble equipment for the rest of his party.

He intended to polish their abilities, but with that alone, from how his surroundings were growing, he wondered if that might be insufficient.

Especially with Rudel, Eunius and Luecke, those three were outside the norm. He didn't know how it happened, but the three of them had continued down their own paths at a breakneck pace.

In such a situation, Aleist wasn't stupid enough to think the enemy would remain weak.

"At the very least, if it has a slight effect..."

If he found the opportunity, he wanted to circulate weapons outside his part as well. That alone should have some effect. As he walked, thinking over such a thing, he was able to spot his destination smithy.

When it came to the blacksmithy run by people of the orient, it was famous in town. He located it in no time. The fact everyone knew it meant it was surely well known.

... Though whether that was in a good or bad sense was a separate issue.

"Good of 'ya to come, punk!"

"How's yer armor feelin'? Crazy, right?"

When those kimono-clad quiet-looking craftsmen-esque men caught sight of Aleist, they approached him with words that felt off from their appearance. Those words that brought a delinquent to mind were something Aleist was no good at dealing with.

"T-today, I've come for—"

"Haah?"

While they were likely acting normal, they had originally flowed to this town and lived in the slums. They had picked up the language there, so it couldn't be helped that their words were rough. And as those words actually went through, the craftsmen lost the chance to correct their way of speech.

"N-no... um, this."

He presented the cloth-wrapped holy sword to one of the craftsmen. But Aleist was growing weak at the knees as that scary-faced man accepted it with careful hands. The moment he took the sword out of its cloth, the man's eyes opened wide.

“It’s rusted through, damn fool!”
“Bastard, how in the ‘ell could you let it get this bad!?”
“I’m soooooorrrrryyy!”

Quite a bit of time was wasted before he finally managed to inform them the holy sword was something he found.



Led inside the smithy, Aleist sat across from a man called Zouken.

Having returned to find his smiths making a ruckus, Zouken found himself taking it up. Zouken was a swordsmith, the most knowledgeable when it came to these sorts of weapons.

And after hearing Aleist’s circumstances, he laughed with a troubled face.

“Then I must apologize for that. It’s not as if they had any ill intent, it’s just, the place they learned their words is... when I was out buying and selling, they were finding daily work in the slums.”

In the harshest of times, Zouken went out to sell his katanas, while the other craftsmen worked in the slums to eat. Now they had worked together to borrow a workshop and they were making goods to sell.

“I see. Even so, you’re making all sorts of things here.”

The inside of the room was decorated with the weapon’s they’d made. Looking over them, Aleist was growing interested in the peculiar equipment. His own armor was the same, but he felt an affinity with these pieces that had a somewhat Japanese make.

“We make to order, after all. Never troubled with putting food on the table.”

Zouken appraised the rusted, rotted sword in his hands as he conversed with Aleist. Zouken’s group was one thing, but there was something else that piqued Aleist’s curiosity. It was the famed blade they were supposed to possess.

The sword’s name was Yakumo... in the kata line, it was the blade that boasted the highest class specs. While Aleist couldn’t use it, he thought it might prove useful to Izumi so he decided to ask.

“Pardon me, but do you happen to have a sword called Yakumo?”

That expensive sword was something that, forget early game, it was an item considerably beyond one's reach through mid game as well. But the current Aleist had some financial leisure. Despite everything, he was still the eldest son of a Count. He had carried considerable funding with him when he left on this journey.

"You know about Yakumo? Unfortunately, I sold it. I consider that man my savior, you see. I can't bring myself to buy it back."

"Ah, if it's been sold, then it can't be helped. There's just this oriental woman I know, and that person wields a katana."

Aleist recalled Izumi. Come to think of it, she had received a katana from Rudel as a present. HE heard it was something cheap, but he remembered the way she rejoiced to be something amazing.

"Gifting a katana to a lady... is that the trend these days?"

"No, not that I've heard of."

As the two of them exchanged some trifling words, confusion began to set on Zouken's face. As he looked at the holy sword in his hands, he gave a firm tilt to his head.

"What's wrong."

Finishing his appraisal, Zouken spread a cloth over the ground before carefully laying the holy sword over it. He unraveled a number of points bothering him.

"Is this really something of the past? No, this rot is definitely one of years, but... the make is, you see..."

Aleist explained the circumstances behind how he obtained it and gave a general outline of the era from the journal. Taking those into perspective, it was definitely a relic of centuries past. Zouken didn't seem satisfied but he continued on.

"It's not as if I don't believe you, but this one's make is too new."

"New?"

As Aleist directed his eyes at the sword placed on the ground, Zouken explained it so he could understand.

“It’s the technique, or rather the manufacturing process. Its make is more advanced than what’s going around now. Tempering some sort of magic-imbued material into the metal, and there’s the stone embedded into the blade. That is a sort of gemstone with mana sealed into it. I’ve heard that the blacksmiths of the royal capital have only recently managed to create a sword like this. From what I’ve heard, this one is of a much higher completion, but...”

Struggling to say something, Zouken mulled a bit before giving a suitable hypothesis. And he forcefully made himself come to terms with it.

“Well, it’s possible that an old manufacturing process was lost, and it’s only being rediscovered now. When you think of it like that, those craftsmen of the past must have been quite advanced. Though it vexes me to say it as a blacksmith myself.”

Aleist agreed with Zouken’s words, and he restarted the conversation.

“So will you be able to use it to make something?”

“I can. Rather, it’s the best possible material. From what I can see, it’s got quite a bit of use into it.”

Relieved that it could be used, Aleist requested the making of a weapon. But there, Zouken made a misunderstanding.

“Show me your sword and your hands.”

“Yes?”

As asked, he displayed his two swords and his hands. Zouken nodded a few times as he started taking notes.

“So you’re fine with it being augmented into those two swords, right? It’ll take a bit of time... half a year. No, if you give me three months, I’ll show you I can get it done.”

“No, um...”

Aleist noticed Zouken was trying to use the holy sword as a material to reforge his own blades. He tried to deny it, but Zouken smiled.

“To be able to make a weapon for a swordsman of such caliber, my skills are crying out. I’ll call for my craftsmen friends at once, and make you the finest of swords.”

He looked extremely delighted. And Aleist...

“I-I’ll leave it to you.”

Was unable to tell him it was a misunderstanding.

Chapter 131: Erselica Rises to the Stage

Pasette Yulineria was decoding the journal she obtained in the cave.

The room she stayed had a simple desk and lamp, so even when night fell, she was able to read. Her tired roommate was already in her bed, in a world of dreams. She was a commoner girl, who kicked the cover away to expose her undergarments.

Standing once from her chair, Pasette re-draped the cover over her.

Normally, she tied her slightly-curling brown hair back, but for now, it was down. Her hair that grew just barely reaching her back, the girl thought it was just in the way. She wanted to cut it short, but with the reactions of her surroundings, she wasn't able to.

Her parents opposed, saying it wasn't good for a girl to have her hair too short.

Pasette herself strongly wished to cut it, but she couldn't make it any shorter.

She returned to the desk and sat in the chair. To the side of the journal, Pasette had her memo pad and references scattered around, which she began to clean up. She intended to go until she reached a good stopping point. But it seems she had grown heated and hurried forth a bit.

"I should call it quits for today."

The journal detailed the region the hero had lived in. Time-wise, it was an era tormented by the Gora. If it was before the founding of Courtois, then it would also have to be before the warring states period. When she read about his daily life, she grew excited and tried to compare it to the books she used as reference.

But she felt something was off. The individual who wrote the journal, she got the feeling his thought process was too close to their own... to that of their own era. There were descriptions of the inconvenience he felt at the technologies that were likely brand new at the time.

There were places where the old paper had been ruined and rendered

illegible, but Pasette was curious about the last page. Alongside a message to entrust the Holy Sword to whoever found it, it gave Aleist's name. Pasette had thought it was the name of the diary's author.

But would they really write their name on the last page? It bothered her.

"The book's cover is too tattered... hah, even so, our captain sure is mysterious."

From Pasette's point of view, Aleist was the same age as the rest of them, and an elite entrusted with a commanding role. But in actuality, he had cleaning duties shoved onto him for more than half a year, and the members of his platoon were all women.

All things considered, the personnel selection seemed too mismatched. At first, Pasette didn't have any interest in Aleist. But as they journeyed together, she was among those whose hearts were moved by the gap between the leisure he showed and his usual conduct.

"When we were cleaning, I'd always wonder if he'd be alright, but the black knight is different after all."

Relaxing and stretching her stiff body, Pasette extinguished the lamp atop the desk and made for the bed. Once the room's light died down, she could see the lights outside. The light of the stars, and the slightly-distant lights of the business district.

As she absentmindedly gazed from the bed out the window, she heard a voice from the room next door.

'Prepare yourself, Captain Aleist!'

'Noooo!! Stop, don't be violent!!'

'It'll end in no time. Just count the number of stains on the ceiling!'

'I don't want to! I... I want my body to stay pure!'

'Ah, don't run! At this rate, there's a possibility your body will be forever defiled! In that case, can't you just give your first time to me!?''

'A girl shouldn't crawl into someone's bed! I'm begging you, just let me sleep!!'

Alongside those boisterous voices, she could hear the sound of the door slamming open with good momentum, and Aleist running down the corridor. A

little later came the footsteps of her colleague giving chase. Ever since they had acted alongside Lieutenant Keith, the anxiety amongst the female knights had grown.

For the sake, these sorts of exchanges had grown in numbers.

(So today it's Fizz.)

Fizz Brandt was the third daughter of a Baron House. When she learned she would become the second wife of a noble who'd lost his first if she stayed, she ran off to the academy, and stayed there until she became a knight. Older than them, and having been born into a relatively affluent household, she was a woman who received a firm and proper education... or that's how it was supposed to be, but with such a tasty meal before her eyes, it seems she was unable to hold back.

(Fizz does get blinded by appearance, after all.)

Close in age to her, and be that as it may, he came from a high status. To Fizz, it was a chance she couldn't let get away.

The current Aleist was definitely set to take one of Courtois' two princesses as a bride. When that happened, it would mean the rise of Aleist's Hardie House. To marquis, or even archduke... perhaps the era of Three Lords would change to four.

A new archduke house would be born. To the nobles of Courtois, this was a serious affair. It meant the factions would largely shift. What's more, the Hardie House was an upstart with few usable vassals. Even if they scraped them up from their relatives, there's no way that would be sufficient.

The birth of a new power would be the trigger for large change in Courtois' stagnant noble society. For better or worse, Aleist was at the center of that.

"Hah, in that case, do the captain's rivals have the upper hand? They're archdukes to begin with, so maybe there's no room for him to step in."

The violent mistress candidate dispute had reached a dreadful impasse. At first, Pasette thought as long as it would aid in her excavations, she would raise her name as a candidate. But as she continued interacting with Aleist, she came to hate herself for that.

“I never should’ve fallen for him... if I didn’t fall, then right around now, I’d be able to act for nothing more than my own profit. I really am an idiot.”

Passing for a book-loving girl before Aleist, Pasette was also considering taking action like Fizz. She hated that part of her.

(I wonder what other stories the journal has to tell.)

Closing her eyes, Pasette fell asleep. Those two would probably return eventually. It was unknown whether Aleist would be caught and dragged back, or he’d run until dawn and Fizz would give up.

‘After you’ve made a woman do so much, you’re running away!?’
‘Man and woman doesn’t matter! What’s important is how we feel about one another!’

‘Feelings and shit like that will work itself out later! I’ve already prepared my heart, mind you.’

‘And I haven’t prepared mine! Seriously, stop it! Why is my platoon full of so many carnivorous beasts!?’

‘If it’s going to be stolen anyway, then give it to me! What are you unsatisfied with!? I know I shouldn’t be the one to say it, but my appearance isn’t a problem, is it!?’

‘It’s what’s inside! Show a little more prudence!’

The voices came from outside the inn. Pasette knew the two of them had run out, and she grew fed up over what they were doing. But she did hope Aleist would run away.



Aleist kept low in a small lane between buildings.

The darkness that clad the black knight... freely manipulating his shadow, he hid from Fizz.

(Why am I using the black knight’s abilities to run and hide... and this isn’t the harem I imagined. It’s too muddled, I can’t take this anymore.)

The Platoon’s composition was an order from up high. Even when Aleist exercised his authority, it was splendidly crushed to bits. Looking out the darkness, he saw Fizz draped in a gown pass nearby.

“He got away again. The captain should just give it up already.”

Passing straight by him, Fizz returned to the inn. Aleist showed his form from his shadow, getting his messed-up pajamas in order. As a nightcrawling countermeasure, he placed his slippers where they could be worn in an instant, so he wasn't barefoot.

Fizz's late start came from her exercise of the minimum level of womanly modesty; she had searched for a gown and slippers, making her a little late to leave the room.

“This is definitely wrong. Why am I going through something like this?”

Lamenting, Aleist determined it was too dangerous to return to the inn. In order to kill a bit of time, he sunk into the shadows and gazed at the sky.

The sky he could see between the gap in the roofs looked more pretty than the one from the world he had been. Inside, he dreamed of looking up at the stars with Millia, in a place vaster than this.

But that was impossible, he had come to understand as of late. Whatever the case, Aleist's standing was still dubious. He was an upstart noble, and with his house's momentum, the surroundings had taken an adequate distance to watch them. Aleist's parents' thought processes were closer to a merchant than a noble, so they were pretty much neglecting the obligations of a noble.

He had received a noble's education, but he was dim on the topic of noble marriages to continue on the house.

Just as a fiancée had been decided for Rudel in his student days, Luecke and Eunius had numerous candidates. Magic granted a level of longevity so they wouldn't be wed in their student days, but even so, it wasn't rare for there to be a formal engagement for a student.

And since he'd been recognized as the black knight, women were flocking around Aleist.

“For some reason, it's quiet around Rudel, though.”

What he couldn't accept was Rudel's situation. Aleist was paying caution to the rumors surrounding Rudel. But he didn't hear the slightest rumor of

engagement or women. When he heard talks of some noble plotting a marriage, in the next week it was as if nothing happened at all.

“Having just one wife... is it really impossible?”

There was a time where he wanted to be surrounded by lots of women, but now, Aleist had someone he liked. When he had someone in his heart, he couldn't think of laying hands on another woman. But by the time he noticed it, he was in a situation that wouldn't permit it.

“Hah, what do I do if the number increases again...”

Dry up and die. That wasn't a joke, that situation truly was encroaching on him. At present, it was decided a princess of Courtois would marry into the Hardie House. Normally, Rudel marrying one of the princesses and succeeding the throne would be the ideal.

But the man in question had no such will, and the palace was moving as if it detested the very notion. A member of the dragoons, the heroes of Courtois, and rider of a rare white dragon, there was no one in the world better to make a symbol.

Though he'd hate that, Aleist gave a bitter smile.

When he dropped by the port town of Beretta, he saw Rudel get all muddled up as he did his best. Aleist was honestly envious. He seemed truly delighted as he worked.

“It's a good thing for a dream to be granted. But dreams, eh...”

Aleist thought over what he was aiming for. Beating the last boss was natural. Otherwise, the country would cease to exist. Even if it remained, it would be cornered into a harsh situation.

But what did he seek beyond that? To Aleist, it was much too obscure.

They were lives of pretty much running down predetermined rails, but even so, Luecke and Eunius were putting in the greatest effort they could. Even as they shouldered responsibility and expectations, the way they did what they wanted was envious.

“Just what is the protagonist supposed to be...”

Stabbed with a difference of values, Aleist looked at the sky and muttered.



In a café of the capital, Erselica and Lena were led to a private room.

As with the building's exterior, there was considerably craftsmanship put into the inside as well. That shop that nobles would use by choice was a harsh shop where customers were also requested to follow a certain level of manners.

Erselica turned to look at a restless Lena.

"Calm down a bit."

"No, I mean... I haven't worn a skirt in a while no, and dresses are a bit..."

Normally preferring Rudel's hand-me-downs and men's wear, Lena grabbed and lifted up the hem of her skirt. At that gesture, the host's expression reacted with a twitch, so Erselica stopped Lena with a glare.

The reason the two of them had dressed up and come to the capital was definitely not to play.

It was to hear of the palace's current state of affairs from a certain Luecke Halbades. Erselica had investigated into Luecke as much as she could. He shared what could be called a close friendship with Rudel, and he had no relations to the traitors Chlust was worried about... at the very least, she approached him with the hopes he wasn't related.

She had similarly tried to get in contact with Eunius, but as luck would have it, he was currently out of the capital.

"Walk this way."

The host who led them to the private room with polite gestures closed the door behind them. Inside, a different employee was preparing tea.

Light streamed in from the large window. But from the positioning of the tables and chairs, there was no worry of it becoming too bright.

"Luecke-san!"

"Wait, Lena!"

As Lenna suddenly let a loud voice into the calm café air, Erselica panicked.

The employee was about to caution her when Luecke got the better of him.

“My apologies. We’ll be talking a while, so after the tea is prepared, leave us be a while.”

“Understood.”

After preparing three people’s worth of tea and snacks, the employee left the room. Erselica pinched her skirt’s hem to give a curtsy, and Lena did her best to imitate. Unlike when she was holding a spear, why did she look so unreliable? Erselica was perplexed.

“Well, take a seat. We don’t need any of that stiff stuff today. If you make me act like that even on my days off, you’re going to wear me out.”

(He’s an adult.)

Erselica felt relieved at the leisure Luecke gave off. Taking a seat with Lena, she gave a simple greeting. The air he gave off was different than that of the boys she would usually meet, causing her to feel something close to admiration.

However...

“Ah, Luecke-san, could you tell us about noble relations? Me and my brother are no good with that stuff. But Erselica said she wanted to hear, so...”

“... Lena, how could you be so rude? You’re before a future archduke. Even if he told us to act normally, the minimum level of etiquette m—”

“Leave it to me. I prepared in a way that’s easy to understand.”

All for it, Luecke handed the documents to Erselica. On it, the general relationship between the current noble houses was spelled out. There were a number of pages, so he must have gone through some effort to prepare it. But something smelled fishy to Erselica.

“Are you done preparing for the academy?”

“We’re all good. I rented out big bro and Sacky, so me and Erselica are going to have an elegant trip through the sky. Ay, this cookie’s nice.”

“I see. If anything happens, just tell me. There are some things Rudel won’t be able to deal with when he’s out on the border.”

As Lena and Luecke spoke with smile, Luecke casually took a memo of the

name of the sweet Lena said was good. When Lena directed her eyes at Luecke's plate, he gave a warm smile as he passed it over. And then there were none.

(... Huh? He's acting somewhat different than before.)

Sure enough, he had perfectly looked into what was request. And Erselica was satisfied with the contents. But leaving her to the side, the sight of the pleasant chat between the two brought a few things to mind.

(As I thought, Rudel's friends are usually strange.)

Erselica scanned through the documents as she thought such a thing.